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Input from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat hereby transmits the input from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean to the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

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Summary of the Chair of the second meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development

[Original: Spanish]

I. Introduction

1. At the thirty-sixth session of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), held in Mexico City from 23 to 27 May 2016, the member States adopted resolution 700 (XXXVI), sponsored by Mexico, establishing the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development as a regional mechanism to follow up and review the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), its targets and means of implementation, including the Addis Ababa Action Agenda adopted at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development.

2. The first meeting of the Forum was held in Mexico City, from 26 to 28 April 2017. The meeting was chaired by Mexico, in its capacity as Chair of the Committee of the Whole of ECLAC, and convened under the auspices of the Commission.

3. The second meeting of the Forum was held in Santiago, from 18 to 20 April 2018, chaired by Mexico, and convened under the auspices of the Commission. The meeting of the Forum was open to member States of the Forum and observers, the United Nations system, regional and subregional bodies, international financial institutions, the private sector and civil society.

4. The purpose of the meetings of the Forum was to share experiences and best practices among the Latin American and Caribbean countries regarding actions taken to implement the SDGs in the region.

II. Presentation of the Second annual report on regional progress and challenges in relation to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, by the secretariat of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean[1]

5. The Second annual report on regional progress and challenges in relation to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development reflected the progress made by the region regarding the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, namely, all countries had a medium-term development vision; the practice of planning had made a comeback, as had that of designing a national inter-institutional and intersectoral framework; and the regional architecture for implementing the 2030 Agenda had been strengthened; the SDGs had been integrated into national development plans and public budgets; transparency and open government had been afforded importance; and new spaces for dialogue between government, business, academia and citizens had been created. The challenges to be overcome included the difficult political situation at the global level, an increase in conservative movements and the re-emergence of nationalist currents in the world, which made it difficult to mobilize resources and consolidate

[1] Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Second annual report on regional progress and challenges in relation to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean* (LC/FDS.2/3), 2018.

international cooperation projects. Fiscal spending had declined and global wealth was becoming more concentrated, which increased inequality. Corruption and public institutions' lack of credibility were eroding the path towards achievement of the SDGs.

6. The countries of the region now had a broader range of institutions responsible for coordinating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and they had identified planning and monitoring mechanisms for the SDG indicators. National statistical capacities had become stronger for measuring various indicators. However, efforts must be redoubled to strengthen statistical capacities for those indicators for which information was not available or was not measured according to the necessary parameters or level of disaggregation. Other agencies, such as central banks, needed to be involved in those efforts so that their data could be used to advance development goals. The collection, analysis and dissemination of big data was an essential tool that complemented official statistics; the joint work of the statistical and geospatial communities represented a significant contribution to the drafting of evidence-based public policies. It was also envisaged that the private sector would be play an important role in data processing and analysis in the region. The authorities on statistical matters in the region were the national statistical systems and the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC.

7. The report also drew attention to the most important challenges facing the region, such as forest cover loss, falling productivity and the need for liveable and sustainable cities and to change consumption and production patterns, control pollution in large cities, improve solid waste management and electricity access and increase the use of renewable energy, which would have a positive impact on the cost of power generation. Urgent and effective action must be taken to prevent the increasing number of extreme climate events, especially in the Caribbean, where building resilience to climate change was a pressing issue. On the tax front, steps should be taken to move towards a progressive regime and combat tax evasion and avoidance. The region's share of trade in goods and services needed to be increased, and intraregional trade integration needed to be strengthened to counteract the effects of external uncertainties. Promoting the technological and digital agenda would play a decisive role in achieving the SDGs in the region; and the speed and quality of broadband connectivity were issues to be resolved as part of the fourth industrial revolution. The report warned that the environmental big push would require the region to make a great effort of political leadership, governance, capacity-building and institution-building, as well as changing the conversation between State, the market and society.

8. The second meeting of the Forum represented an effort to change the future of Latin America and the Caribbean and reflected the political will of the countries, at a time when the region was in a position to show leadership in sustainable development. Three topics were crucial in that regard: the participation of citizens in the process of achieving the SDGs; developing a strategic people-centred vision, which ECLAC had defined as sustainable development with equality, and an analysis of each country's strategic advantages in the economic, social and environmental dimensions.

9. The SDGs demanded a holistic approach to public policies. As elements necessary for the achievement of the SDGs in the region, the member States present at the meeting drew attention to the involvement of civil society as a whole and of subregional governments; the mobilization of public and private resources; a change in production and consumption patterns; the transfer of technology and new, additional and predictable resources of all kinds under favourable conditions for developing countries; the elimination of unilateral coercive measures; the evolution of labour markets; reconsideration of GDP as an indicator of progress towards the

Goals; rural transformation; efforts to achieve an environmentally-friendly economy; and permanent monitoring of equality.

III. Peer learning sessions

10. The peer learning sessions addressed the following topics: (i) challenges of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Caribbean; (ii) participatory approaches to implementing the 2030 Agenda; (iii) platforms for follow-up to the Sustainable Development Goals; and (iv) continuity in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and new challenges.

11. With regard to the challenges of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Caribbean, countries drew attention to their particular difficulties, such as shortage of resources to finance the implementation of the SDGs, compounded by inefficiencies and corruption. De-risking policies were affecting correspondent banking and remittances in the Caribbean, restricting the countries' access to payment systems and global financing, risking the viability of their banking services and threatening to cut them off from the global financial system. Raising awareness of the contents and scope of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs among various sectors of society would help build understanding of the link between the SDGs and the efforts needed for national development. There was also a need for capacity-building and adequate human resources to ensure the effective implementation of the SDGs, in addition to which national labour forces were being affected by migration. One of the key challenges facing the Caribbean was the impact of climate change and vulnerability to natural disasters, as well as constraints on resilience-building owing to the lack of appropriate technology and capacity.

12. The proposals discussed for addressing those challenges included enhancing statistical capacity and knowledge-sharing partnerships, as well as the use of information and communication technologies for e-government. The various agencies operating in the Caribbean also needed to be better coordinated to formulate more effective strategies that support faster recovery after disasters. Redefining the classification system for disaster-affected countries would make it easier for them to obtain concessional financing in line with their real situation. ECLAC had proposed making the Caribbean a priority and called upon the governors of international banks (IMF, World Bank and IDB) to reduce the external debt of the countries in the subregion by establishing a resilience fund. ECLAC was working with the European Union and OECD to change the criteria for the classification of middle-income countries, which could be achieved with the support of member States.

13. The panel on participatory approaches to implementing the 2030 Agenda discussed actions taken in the countries of the region to open spaces for dialogue with civil society, the private sector, academia and other stakeholders. Citizen participation in the establishment of implementation mechanisms helped to ensure the visibility of women, children, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and Afrodescendants. It was essential to mainstream the human rights perspective in the implementation of the SDGs. Citizens' awareness of the 2030 Agenda was essential for ensuring their commitment to its implementation. The business sector also needed to become aware of the possibilities and gains offered by the activities related to SDG issues — in the area of alternative sources of energy production, for example — and actively participate in implementation. Academia played a crucial role looking forward, because of its work in raising awareness and shaping studies and knowledge. The work of States with local governments was critical, given that territories were different and therefore required different treatments. It was also important to have appropriate sources of financing for work in support of the SDGs, in particular from

tax sources. The process towards the achievement of the Goals should be based on State policies that extended beyond the terms of government mandates. The management of statistical information and institution-building were challenges for the region. Public policymaking and the engagement of all sectors were essential in moving towards the achievement of the SDGs, to which all the countries of the region were committed.

14. With respect to platforms for monitoring the SDGs, there was a need to build on existing measuring and monitoring systems, and to make further progress in strengthening the framework for aligning national development goals with the SDGs. It was important to place systems within an institutional context, as SDG monitoring was not merely about compiling statistics, but rather about coordinating public policies. Information needed to be integrated into a system accessible to citizens, not only to statisticians and policymakers. Given the availability of administrative records in the region that would serve for SDG monitoring, progress must be made in improving their quality and digitization. Data interoperability, open data and open sources, as well as the use of common standards among countries, would help to reduce costs and make the region more independent in that regard, as well as enhancing accountability and transparency.

15. With regard to continuity in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and new challenges, it was emphasized that SDG implementation needed to be a policy of State, not of the sitting government, so that transitions between administrations would not hamper their achievement. The existence of institutional networks and citizen participation mechanisms would help to make sure that was the case. SDG 17 on strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development required concerted, cross-cutting action by the range of stakeholders; only a participatory, intraterritorial and whole-of-government process would suffice to give continuity to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The environmental dimension needed to be just as integrated into development policies as the social and economic dimensions, as had been reflected in the voluntary national reports. Some countries of the region had already met certain SDG targets; others were not necessarily applicable in certain contexts. In still others, it was necessary to improve measurement and quantification of the targets and define the efforts needed to achieve them. In that regard, an analysis of the situation for each target in each country would facilitate the development of policies and budgets more in line with reality. Lastly, obtaining the necessary financing was one of the main challenges for continuity in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

IV. Latin American and Caribbean and European interregional dialogue on implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

16. The purpose of this dialogue was to exchange experiences and best practices between the two regions regarding the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda. In the case of Latin America and the Caribbean, essential requirements for the effective implementation of the SDGs included a long-term commitment on the part of the State beyond the term of a single government; the engagement of all stakeholders, in particular the private sector and civil society; the design of cross-cutting policies; the existence of a non-political technical body to perform the measurement and evaluation of progress regarding implementation; regional and international cooperation, especially for experience-sharing and resource mobilization; the alignment of action by regional and international organizations with the realities of each country; linking national budgets to the priorities of the Agenda;

regular updating of the local and national legal framework; the development of communication strategies to democratize the content of the 2030 Agenda and to promote transparency and engagement by the State.

17. In the case of Europe, it was noted that the Goals and the values of the 2030 Agenda were very close to those of the European Union. Unlike the Millennium Development Goals, where Europe had supported their achievement in other countries, the SDGs represented a universal agenda for the solution of shared problems and required the participation of all countries, regardless of their level of development. The European Union had created a high-level institutional structure responsible for promoting and coordinating the implementation of the SDGs in close collaboration with society and with the representation of different interests. The Goals had been incorporated into the European Union's cooperation policy, in line with SDG 17. The adoption of the new European Consensus on Development represented a collective vision of development policy that reflected the 2030 Agenda and involved cooperation with the countries of the region.

18. Actions have also been undertaken in Europe to raise awareness of the SDGs and their importance. Europe had much in common with Latin America and the Caribbean in terms of the diagnoses carried out and the centrality afforded to institutional arrangements and the challenge of mainstreaming. Implementing the SDGs required international cooperation to be closely linked with actions at the national level, which implied a different institutional structure than had operated thus far. In that regard, it was important to involve the institutions that naturally looked to the medium and long term, such as development banks. Challenges to international cooperation included the need to support the poorest countries and middle-income countries alike and to increase financing for development, particularly by mobilizing resources through national sources and private investment. The necessary incentives must therefore be provided, which could be achieved only if appropriate public policies were in place. There were similarities in the follow-up measures adopted in various countries. In that regard, society played a significant role as it encouraged accountability. Ensuring continuity required a renewed social compact on the targets to be achieved and the reforms needed to do so.

19. It was noted that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda required genuine commitment that emerged through dialogue and deliberation between governments and society as a whole. Just as high-level leadership was essential to ensure that all national strategies were in line with development goals, so too was the participation of all stakeholders, based on the principle of shared responsibility and with independent and regular monitoring, evidence-based reporting and accountability. Peer review was also a valuable monitoring tool.

V. The regional dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: contributions of the United Nations system

20. The United Nations was carrying out a reform of the peace and security pillar, the development pillar and its administration, which included the Secretariat, as well as the system's funds, programmes and specialized agencies. ECLAC and the system agencies complied with the mandates emanating from the member countries. ECLAC was an intergovernmental platform in which the 33 countries of the Latin American and Caribbean region took part equally and equitably, and in which countries from outside the region also participated; its subsidiary bodies enabled progress to be made in the region on specific topics. The Commission also provided technical cooperation and advice at the request of member countries. Over the course of its 70-year history of fruitful work, ECLAC thinking had been intrinsic to the economic history of the

region. The commitment of ECLAC had been and was still to support the countries of the region on the road to development.

21. At a time when multilateralism was under pressure from the global political context and the world was facing challenges such as inequality, climate change and conflicts, the United Nations must continue to partner efficiently with countries to achieve development, and for that its bodies must work in a cohesive, effective and accountable manner, guided by results. To that end, a reform is needed to establish a new generation of country teams that could respond to national needs; strengthen the resident coordinator systems with greater capacity, leadership, accountability and impartiality; adopt a coordinated, region-wide approach to face transborder challenges; renew spaces for Member States to guide the system's actions, with greater oversight, which would improve transparency and accountability with regard to results at the country level; lead the Organization to adopt an institutional response and a system-wide approach to partnerships for achieving the Agenda; take concrete steps to accelerate the system's alignment with the 2030 Agenda through a strategic framework; and adopt a financing compact to improve the quality, quantity and predictability of resources, in exchange for greater efficiency, transparency and accountability of the results across the system. That reform would be complemented by strengthening the role of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). A dual approach has been proposed, which included optimizing collaboration and synergies at the regional level and renewing United Nations assets in the region. The United Nations reform would allow the Organization's activities to meet the needs of its Member States. The fundamental role of regional platforms such as ECLAC and its important work with other regional commissions was also highlighted.

22. Progress had been made in the region with regard to the 2030 Agenda, such as the creation of new inter-institutional coordination mechanisms, the formulation of development plans that take the SDGs into account, the review of national budgets to finance the SDGs and the expansion of policies that combine the three dimensions of sustainable development. However, countries had yet to overcome challenges related to, among other things, discrimination, in particular against indigenous and Afrodescendent peoples; gender inequalities; sustainable human developments; nutrition, especially in early childhood; the development of rural communities; and the strengthening of social security mechanisms, which were topics that bodies such as the United Nations Development Group-Latin America and the Caribbean (UNDG-LAC), UN-Habitat, WFP, IFAD, FAO, UNFPA, UNICEF and UNDP, had explored in the work at the regional level. In addition to addressing the regional challenges together based on inter-agency collaboration, the work of the Resident Coordinators and the country teams was indispensable. The United Nations must support countries' activities and they in turn must ensure that their concerns are reflected in the documents submitted to the General Assembly.

VI. Dialogues on multi-stakeholder contributions to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

23. During these dialogues the speakers underscored the importance of participation by the private sector in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the opportunity the Agenda offered for firms to align their business and corporate practices with the SDGs, which provided very clear complementary goals and targets. Business commitment to sustainability, which was rewarded by investors, needed to be part of business models and firms neglecting that compromised their viability, as markets could not prosper in societies that failed to respect the basic rights of their citizens.

Firms should convey that commitment in a transparent manner to their interlocutors, including government and investors.

24. International financial institutions contributed to improving the compilation and use of data for the benefit of open government. It was important to crowd in financing from the private sector by eliminating barriers to its participation in financing for development. The complexity of the SDGs required the formation of effective partnerships with a greater number of partners, both traditional and new. Academia should provide spaces for reflection and impact to develop ideas and solutions for the new challenges of sustainable development.

25. Civil society organizations emphasized the importance of disseminating the 2030 Agenda among young people, the effective participation of trade unions in the permanent mechanisms of implementation and follow-up of the SDGs, and the central objective of achieving gender equality across the board as a necessary condition for development. One of the main results of the Forum was the outstanding role played by civil society in organizing and creating a mechanism for participation in the Forum of the Countries of the Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development in a consensual, participatory and democratic manner, which enabled that key stakeholder to contribute more effectively to regional efforts related to the 2030 Agenda.

26. The Forum offered the opportunity for a profound and productive dialogue on the progress made by countries and the challenges they face in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The meeting had allowed the governments to share their experiences and learn from the experiences and best practices of difference countries and stakeholders, as well as the strategies that various international organizations had implemented to support countries in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The meeting had also allowed international agencies to gain a better understanding of countries' needs, creating a space for mutual learning and identifying opportunities for cooperation and collaboration. ECLAC was at the forefront of the regional dimension of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and played a fundamental role in supporting States' efforts to strengthen that space for exchange to offer all stakeholders the opportunity to listen to and learn from each other and share good practices.

27. Several participants drew attention to the creation and consolidation of the Forum as an important space for fruitful dialogue and mutual learning, compared to the global mechanism for follow-up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, namely the high-level political forum on sustainable development. Major progress had been made with regard to the format and modalities of the Forum, and, more importantly, awareness of the topics and issues raised at the second meeting of the Forum.

VII. Dialogues on the shift towards sustainable development and resilient societies (Sustainable Development Goals 6, 7, 11, 12, 15 and 17)

28. These dialogues took the form of three round tables, which examined the economic, social and environmental challenges of implementing the 2030 Agenda.

29. With regard to the economic challenges, Latin America had made progress on drawing up a set of indicators, although the resources obtained fell woefully short of what was actually needed, which represented a major challenge when aligning budgets with the public policies aimed at achieving the SDGs. All available resources must therefore be mobilized for the countries of the region and developed countries

must honour their official development assistance commitments. South-South and triangular cooperation could also contribute to achieving the Agenda, although it was not a substitute for North-South cooperation. Climate change and the magnitude of natural disasters had had negative consequences for the region, forcing resources that could have been used to achieve the SDGs to be redirected to recovery efforts. To that end, synergies must be established among the countries of the region, which must reiterate the same message in international forums on those issues. The region had proved resilient in the face of external economic shocks, despite its ongoing dependence on natural resources and low-value-added exports. The 2030 Agenda required countries to transition to a green economy and a circular economy, in which science, technology and innovation were a cross-cutting element for achieving several of the SDG targets. Conditions must be created for the private sector to participate in the development process, tax systems must promote greater equality and illicit financial flows must be addressed. The international consensus on development needs within the framework of the Agenda must be translated into support.

30. Financing for development challenges facing the region included the existence of highly regressive tax systems, incentive schemes that were not clearly linked to development targets, alarming levels of tax evasion, and illicit financial flows (which were not necessarily derived from illegal activities, but rather were the result of foreign trade that had dodged tax liabilities), which meant that countries did not receive substantial resources that could have helped to finance the implementation of the SDGs. Faced with the problems created by weak taxation and the flight of resources from many of the region's economies, greater emphasis must be placed on the rule of law as an enabling factor for development, through law enforcement, legal certainty and the fight against crime, including financial crime.

31. One of the social challenges of implementing the 2030 Agenda was inter-institutionality. Progress could not be made down the path to sustainable development or in the fight against inequality without ongoing inter-institutional and intersectoral efforts. Inter-institutionality must be robust and transparent and not affected by changes in government or holders of public office, to ensure that effective policies could be pursued. It was a complex task that had to be shaped continually and that would promote the efficient allocation of resources and prevent overlap between plans and programmes. Social issues were not confined to the social sphere, in the same way that economic and environmental issues were not confined to those spheres. They were interdependent dimensions that not only had a cause and effect relationship, but which also complemented each other and created synergies. That was why coordinated efforts among the different ministries and institutions was fundamental. It was also essential to promote efforts and dialogue among multiple stakeholders from the public sector, the private sector, academia and civil society to achieve the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The participation of civil society and stakeholders at the subnational level was of particular importance.

32. Efforts must be made to raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda among the different levels of government, as well as among all the stakeholders involved. However, an important challenge was the definition of roles and, more particularly, raising awareness of the need for each stakeholder to play the role assigned to them. Attention was also drawn to the importance of restoring trust in institutions and to the fact that those same institutions must take the lead in that regard. When the system privileged the well-being of all, economic growth produced development and, for that to happen, a political project was needed that pursued that objective. Science, technology and innovation created a link between social development and economic development, creating an enabling environment that would benefit education and training, which were crucial to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

33. With regard to the environmental challenges, attention was drawn to the need to address the growing demand for natural resources in the next few years, without eroding the availability of those resources for future generations. Economies and societies were inefficient in that regard, but policies could promote a shift towards efficient resource use. The indicators used to measure progress included green employment and green growth as cross-cutting factors to measure which actions could generate changes. It was essential to link environmental targets with productivity indicators, for example by applying subsidies to sustainable production activities. Environmental matters had to be approached from a long-term perspective.

34. The 2030 Agenda, more than having environmental goals, was environmental as a whole, because progress could not be made on health or industrialization without taking the relevant environmental considerations into account. There was an unbreakable link between environmental challenges and social and economic challenges. Where it was difficult to reconcile economic and environmental aspects in a positive manner, very often the environmental aspect lost out, owing to institutional design failures rooted firmly in inequality. For example, given that 60% of water went to agriculture, one way of moving towards its sustainable use (SDG 6) would be to limit the use of water in agriculture, but that conflicted with the need to increase food production to achieve food security for a growing population (SDG 2). To move away from the need to choose between the economic and the social, on the one hand, and the economic and the environmental, on the other, a culture of collaboration needed to be created between the three dimensions, a process that had to be done at the territorial level.

VIII. Special session on artificial intelligence: accelerated technological change

35. In this session it was remarked that the new technologies, especially artificial intelligence, represented a deep shift that impacted the production, labour, social and political fields. The region was engaging in analysis and discussion on the matter, both at the regional level and within the United Nations. The region needed to be more informed about the subject and its implications; the United Nations and ECLAC should compile, analyse and disseminate information in that regard to the countries of the region, while the countries should analyse options in relation to public policies, governance and regulation, and exchange best practices and foster education systems that promoted innovation. All that should form part of a collective effort to develop regulatory frameworks to address the impacts of artificial intelligence and the technological shift. It was proposed to create a Group of Friends of ECLAC to analyse that topic and to seek the support of the region overall following its recent inclusion as a permanent item on the agenda of the United Nations General Assembly.

36. For the first time in history, not only human's physical skills, but also their cognitive skills, were being rapidly surpassed by smart, capable machines, which represented a radical transformation in economic, social, political, cultural, biological and cognitive terms. Institutions changed in a linear manner, whereas advanced technologies changed exponentially. Digitization and artificial intelligence were optimizing organization, management, hiring and the monitoring of the productivity of professional and manual workers. There was a shift in client relations and in firms' predictive and planning capacities. In the case of manufacturing, artificial intelligence had increased robots' skill and flexibility to address more and more economic activities and niches.

37. A noticeable effect in the developed countries was the reduction in new sources of work, which was putting pressure on labour markets, wages and companies'

standards of administrative and productive efficiency. It was possible that a sudden deindustrialization could occur in the region's maquila sectors. Technology by itself was neither good or bad; it was our responsibility to use it in the service of achieving the SDGs. While some affirmed that exponential technological change would continue to be led by the explosion of artificial intelligence, others concluded that rapid change would cause unstoppable socioeconomic risks. Regardless of those views, there was still time to forge the future we wanted.

38. The region was especially well placed to make a technological leap; however, inequality, socioeconomic polarization and the low educational standards of its labour force meant that most countries faced particular challenges of whether to adapt to the technological innovations coming from the rest of the world or generate their own. Latin America and the Caribbean urgently needed to reposition its development model and reconfigure the role of the State to spread the benefits and not only the risks of technological progress. The right use of digitization systems and artificial intelligence should enable the public and private sectors to collaborate more effectively to achieve the SDGs.

39. ECLAC had performed analyses of data, algorithms and policies, looking at digital technologies as tools for the achievement of the SDGs. The speed and disruptiveness of those technologies was an important consideration to bear in mind when undertaking activities to promote the region's sustainable development. It was necessary to analyse the speed with which technologies had developed and the readiness of individuals, families, firms and the government and public institutions to adapt to them and put them to beneficial use.

40. There was evidence of acceleration in three areas: the dynamics of employment creation and destruction; the obsolescence of labour skills, which posed challenges for education and vocational training systems; and the change in business models. There was also a risk of increased inequality, given that technology was one of the greatest drivers of income polarization and concentration. To mitigate the risks, specific learning and education activities should be implemented in all sectors and for all age groups aimed at greater employability. Production development policies should also be adopted that galvanize labour demand, create digital and broadband infrastructure and redesign labour institutions. The contribution of ECLAC to reflection on that subject had helped to broaden the spaces for discussion on the matter and would continue to generate valuable inputs that would benefit and help countries to evaluate and prepare for the effects of technological change, artificial intelligence and automation.

IX. Conclusions and recommendations of the second meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development

41. The conclusions and recommendations were submitted to the plenary for consideration and adopted unanimously. They will be presented by the Chair to the meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, which will take place in New York from 9 to 18 July 2018.

Annex

[Original: English]

Intergovernmentally agreed conclusions and recommendations of the second meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development

We, the Ministers and high representatives gathered at the second meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and Caribbean on Sustainable Development convened under the auspices of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in Santiago de Chile, from the 18th to the 20th of April, 2018:

1. *Reaffirm* our commitment to effectively implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, ensuring that no one is left behind, including its Goals and targets, which are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development — economic, social and environmental —, and stress that it is people-centred, universal and transformative and that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, being reaching the furthest behind first and empowering those in vulnerable situations crucial to sustainable development,

2. *Reaffirm* that the Addis Ababa Action Agenda provides a global framework for financing sustainable development, as an integral part of the 2030 Agenda that supports and complements it, and helps to contextualize its means of implementation with concrete policies and actions to achieve its targets; recognize the synergies of the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the New Urban Agenda adopted in Quito, Ecuador, the SAMOA Pathway and the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, recommend further strengthening of multilateral cooperation at the regional and global levels for the effective implementation of the aforementioned instruments; welcome the numerous contributions and the support provided by the United Nations Development System at the regional level, aiming to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and reiterate the need that their activities are carried out in a coherent and coordinated manner and in line with national policies and priorities,

3. *Reaffirm* all the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, including inter alia, the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, as set out in Principle 7 thereof,

4. *Stress* the importance to continue to address the diverse needs and challenges faced by countries in special situations, in particular least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, as well as the specific challenges facing middle-income countries and countries in situation of conflict and post conflict,

5. *Reiterate* the call to the United Nations Development System, in consultation with international financial institutions, to address the specific development needs of middle-income countries through, inter alia, an accurate response to their needs, taking into account variables that go beyond per capita income criteria; recalls that 73 per cent of the world's poor population is concentrated in these countries where cooperation can have a multiplying effect to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals; and look forward to actively participate in the high-level meeting of the General Assembly during its 73rd Session

to discuss the gaps and challenges of middle-income countries in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda,

6. *Recognize* that the follow-up and review at the regional and subregional levels of the 2030 Agenda can, as appropriate, provide useful opportunities for peer learning, including through voluntary reviews, sharing of best practices and discussion on shared targets, and that the resolution 700 (XXXVI) of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) established the Forum of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean for Sustainable Development, as a regional mechanism to follow-up and review the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the Sustainable Development Goals and targets its means of implementation, and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda,

7. *Welcome* efforts at all levels to implement the 2030 Agenda and recognize that after almost three years of implementation, our individual and collective efforts have yielded encouraging results in many areas. However, given the challenges for the region to achieve sustainable development, in particular poverty, inequalities, high global debt and reduced levels of international cooperation, we underscore the need to accelerate both the pace of implementation and raising awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals at all levels, to secure our objectives for people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership,

8. *Welcome* the ongoing efforts to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, and note with appreciation the adoption of the Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the sustainable development framework by 2030, resulting from the Thirteenth Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, and underscore that realizing gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the Sustainable Development Goals and targets, and that the protection and full realization of their human rights are essential to achieving sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth and sustainable development, and in this regard recommend further streamlining a gender approach into national sustainable development policies and strategies,

9. *Stress* the need to take all measures necessary in order to leave no one behind, while respecting and promoting all human rights for all, including social protection and equal access to quality essential public services for all,

10. *Take note with appreciation* ECLAC's second annual report on regional progress and challenges on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean, which provides an evidence-based analysis on opportunities and challenges for our consideration and informs some individual and collective actions carried out by our countries to implement the Sustainable Development Goals, even under an uncertain economic environment constraining the mobilization of resources, and take note of its recommendations to promote inter alia a structural progressive change from a sustainable development perspective, including the set of Sustainable Development Goals that will be reviewed in depth at the 2018 session of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development related to SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, 15, and Goal 17 reviewed annually,

11. *Reaffirm* the commitment to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, and welcome the launch of the International Decade of Action, "Water for Sustainable Development", 2018–2028; recognize that in addition to access to energy, it is still needed to ensure that it is affordable, reliable and sustainable; reiterate the commitment with sustainable urban development, recognizing that more than 80 per cent of the population of the region live in urban areas, and look forward to the regional action plan for the

implementation of the New Urban Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean 2016–2036; reiterate the commitment to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns, and that people in our region have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature, and recognize the need to promote a structural progressive change towards sustainable development to protect ecosystems and biodiversity, reduce deforestation, combat desertification, land degradation and drought, foster strategies for the sustainable use of natural resources and ecosystem services in the region, and look forward for, inter alia, the global observance of the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought, on 17 June 2018, to be hosted by Ecuador,

12. *Commend* the 14 countries of the region that have already presented voluntary national reviews at the ministerial segment of the High-level Political Forum under the auspices of ECOSOC, and the 8 countries preparing to do so in 2018, and highlight the commitment and leadership shown by these 19 countries — of which 3 are presenting a second review — in their efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda, including by integrating it into their national strategies and adjusting institutional set-ups; recommend further volunteering and engaging in the upcoming High-level Political Forum, and look forward to the appropriate allocation of time both, for presentations and feedback from peer ministers,

13. *Welcome* the continuous efforts of countries from our region to implement the 2030 Agenda through its mainstreaming in public policies, institutional arrangements, and national and subnational follow-up and review, and the establishment of twenty national coordination mechanisms for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and encourage these countries to further deepen their national efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and to engage in in-depth knowledge sharing with peers and partners throughout the region,

14. *Acknowledge* the contribution of ECLAC and the Statistical Coordination Group for the 2030 Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean to the indicators of the region in the second report, and recommend its contribution for the next one, and welcome the results of the 9th Statistical Conference of the Americas and its important contribution to advance in the generation of disaggregated, accessible, timely and reliable data, in order to identify inequalities and needs of the most vulnerable, ensuring that no one is left behind,

15. *Welcome* the ongoing process to strengthen and adapt the United Nations Development System to better support Member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and agree with the need stated by the Secretary General to revamp regional structures and look forward to consider the options for longer-term restructuring of the regional assets of the UN to be presented by the Secretary-General avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach; strongly commend the work carried out by ECLAC through its 70 years of existence and its continued effort to support country-led processes; commit to ensure that ECLAC functions and mandate are fully recognized and maintained, particularly its crucial role in the regional dimension of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, and urge the Commission to fully engage in the Secretary General's initiative to revamp the regional assets in benefit of country-led processes and increase, within its mandates, regional initiatives to leave no one behind,

16. *Recognize* the importance of the environmental dimension as one of the three dimensions of sustainable development, and the role of multilateral institutions and agreements that set the global environmental agenda, promoting the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system; and also recognize the role of regional fora on

environmental action, such as the Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean, and its contributions for the follow-up of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,

17. *Recognize* the need to adopt a broader and more people-centred and inclusive preventive approach to disaster risk reduction, ensuring that the policies and practices cover multiple risks and people in vulnerable situations in our region, including by realigning the disaster financing to anticipate, plan for and reduce disaster risk, as well as to promote post-disaster recovery and reconstruction in order to improve efficiency, predictability and speed of response; and further welcome ECLAC's proposal of debt swaps for climate adaptation that address the unsustainable debt burden of the Caribbean economies affected by disasters, while creating a resilience fund to facilitate investment in climate adaptation thereby reducing their vulnerability,

18. *Take note* of the adoption of the "Escazú Regional Agreement" on Access to Information, Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, adopted in Escazú, Costa Rica, which constitutes an important step forward to achieve the 2030 Agenda, and invite all governments of Latin America and the Caribbean to consider becoming a member of the Agreement, which will be open to signature from the 27th of September 2018,

19. *Reaffirm* that States are strongly urged to refrain from promulgating and applying any unilateral economic, financial or trade measures not in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations, that impede the full achievement of economic and social development, particularly in developing countries,

20. *Commit* to continue to promote a universal, rules-based, open, transparent, predictable, inclusive, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system under the World Trade Organization (WTO),

21. *Note with concern* that, despite some improvement in the global and regional economy, this recovery has not been shared among all countries and sectors; and that there are still structural problems aggravated by the reduced access to concessional finance, particularly for middle-income countries. In this regard, emphasize the importance for countries of the region of Official Development Assistance, call the developed countries to fulfil their ODA targets, and reiterate the importance to increase climate financing, which is additional to ODA; and further recognize the necessity of concrete and immediate action to create the necessary enabling environment at all levels for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, including national efforts, international and regional cooperation that supports policies and programmes to increase investment in sustainable development; taking into account that every country has, and shall freely exercise, full permanent sovereignty over all its wealth, natural resources and economic activity,

22. *Further recognize* that inequality, or even a rise in inequality, remains pervasive in countries of the Latin America and the Caribbean, even in those with high levels of economic growth, and that further investment in social services and economic opportunities are needed in order to reduce inequalities and that economic growth needs to be sustained, inclusive and equitable,

23. *Reaffirm* that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development also acknowledges that the implementation of sustainable development will depend on the active engagement of both the public and private sectors, and recognizing that the active participation of the private sector can contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, encourage to align private sector incentives with national public goals towards long-term investment according to national realities and

capacities, including innovative financing instruments and approaches, to bridge the region's structural inequality gaps and eradicate poverty in all its forms and dimensions,

24. *Recommit* to a redoubling of its efforts to substantially curb illicit financial flows by 2030, with a view to eventually eliminating them, including by combating tax evasion, transnational organized crime and corruption through strengthened national regulation and increased international and regional cooperation, to reducing opportunities for tax avoidance,

25. *Reaffirm* that South-South cooperation is an important element of international cooperation for development as a complement to, not a substitute for, North-South cooperation and welcomes the contributions of South-South cooperation to poverty eradication and sustainable development; stress the importance of triangular cooperation as a means of bringing relevant experience and expertise; and look forward to a successful outcome of the Second High-Level UN Conference on South-South Cooperation to be held in Buenos Aires, Argentina from 20–22 March 2019,

26. *Reaffirm* the importance of mobilizing for our region financial and nonfinancial resources and capacity building for the development, transfer, dissemination and diffusion of environmentally sound technologies on favourable terms, including on concessional and preferential terms as mutually agreed, and further recommend to increase international and regional cooperation, inter alia, for the development of endogenous science and technology,

27. *Reaffirm* that science, technology and innovation, including information and communications technologies are essential enablers and drivers for the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in this regard, welcome the ongoing discussions in the I and II Forum on the impact of artificial intelligence on accelerated technological change in sustainable development; look forward to the Conference on Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean which will include a panel on emerging technologies for productivity and inclusion; as well as to the 21st Session of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, that will hold a high-level round table on the impact of rapid technological change on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals; and to the Third Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals, which will include a session on the impact of rapid technological change, including in cases in which changes may occur at an exponential pace, on the achievement of the Sustainable Developing Goals, in order to further elaborate regional recommendations within the Forum of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development; and urge the operationalization of the United Nations online platform as a gateway for information on existing STI initiatives, mechanisms and programs,

28. *Recognize* that each country has primary responsibility for its own economic and social development, as well as for follow up and review of the 2030 Agenda at the national regional and global levels, in relation to the progress made in implementing its goals and targets, taking into account different national, realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities; and that there are different approaches, visions, models and tools available to each country, in accordance with its national circumstances and priorities, to achieve sustainable development,

29. *Welcome* the contributions of all relevant stakeholders to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the region, and the participation according with the resolution 700 (XXXVI) of ECLAC, of parliamentarians, local governments,

private sector, civil society and academia at the Second Forum, and encourage their continued commitment to ensure that no one is left behind,

30. *Request* ECLAC to prepare an updated version of the progress report for the third forum and present it one month in advance, recommend the Presidency of the 37th Session of ECLAC to submit the second progress report, along with the present conclusions and recommendations with a Summary of the Chair, as regional contributions to the 2018 High-Level Political Forum and the ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development, as well as to the United Nations Regional Coordination Mechanism for their due consideration,

31. *Express* our deepest appreciation to the Chair of the 36th session and ECLAC for organizing and hosting the second meeting of the Forum of the Latin American and Caribbean Countries.

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Input from the fourth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat hereby transmits the input from the fourth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, held in Dakar from 2 to 4 May 2018, to the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

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Please recycle

Summary and key messages of the fourth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

[Original: English and French]

I. Introduction

1. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), together with the Government of Senegal and in collaboration with the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank, the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, convened the fourth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, which was held in Dakar from 2 to 4 May 2018, in preparation for the 2018 high-level political forum on sustainable development, to be held in New York from 9 to 18 July 2018.

2. The Regional Forum is an intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder platform to review progress, share experiences and lessons learned and build a consensus on recommendations in the form of key messages to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the goals contained in Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. These messages serve as Africa's collective regional input to the annual high-level political forum.

3. The Regional Forum was attended by 457 participants, comprising high-level representatives of Governments of 40 ECA member States, intergovernmental bodies, major groups and other stakeholders, United Nations bodies and specialized agencies, and other international organizations.

4. Section II presents a summary of presentations, discussions held and key messages arising from the Regional Forum.

II. Summary and key messages

5. The fourth session of the Regional Forum was held on the theme "Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies", in line with that of the 2018 high-level political forum. An in-depth review was carried out of selected Sustainable Development Goals for the high-level political forum, along with Goal 17 and the corresponding goals contained in Agenda 2063 of the African Union, under the following subthemes:

(a) Clean water and sanitation;

(b) Affordable and clean energy;

(c) Sustainable cities and communities;

(d) Responsible consumption and production;

(e) Life on land;

(f) Strengthening the means of implementation and the partnership for sustainable development.

6. Side events held on the margins of the Regional Forum enriched the proceedings of its main session. Among those events were an expert group meeting of selected voluntary national review countries and those countries taking the lead in the implementation of Agenda 2063, and a preparatory and capacity development workshop for major groups and other stakeholders in Africa.

7. The Opening Session was moderated by the Director of the Special Initiatives Division of ECA, Fatima Denton. The Prime Minister of Senegal, Mahammed Boun Abdallah Dionne, officiated at the opening of the Forum, which was also addressed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa, Mohammed Ibn Chambas, the United Nations Resident Coordinator for Senegal, Priya Gajraj, and the Chair of the outgoing Bureau of the Forum, Gervais Meatchi Tchaou.

8. The Prime Minister of Senegal highlighted the relevance of the cluster of Sustainable Development Goals to be reviewed in-depth during the session, stressing that sustainable choices must be the bed rock of all development programmes and activities. The Government of Senegal is committed to sustainable development and has adopted Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and is a signatory to the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The country is rolling out a programme to promote green cities and increasing its use of solar energy.

9. Mr. Chambas mentioned that the theme of the Regional Forum mattered to Africa for many reasons. He said that countries need to increase the pace and scale of implementation of the agendas. In that regard, he called upon countries to keep under regular review their policies and implementation arrangements to match the ambitions and ideals of both the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063; enhance concerted and collective action at the subregional and regional levels; and strengthen and develop home-grown innovative financing mechanisms, such as that epitomized by the signing of the agreement on the Africa Continental Free Trade Area.

10. Ms. Gajraj highlighted development challenges facing Africa, namely poverty, inequality, climate change and terrorism. She emphasized the importance of African societies being resilient and sustainable. Building resilience and having access to technology will promote shared prosperity and decent lives for African communities.

11. Mr. Meatchi said that countries must work together, taking into account areas of convergence and complementarity, without obscuring the specificities among them related to the sizes of their economies. He also stressed the need for coordination among countries.

12. The main session following the opening of the Forum featured a high-level policy dialogue on the theme and plenary presentations and discussions on the progress made at the regional and subregional levels towards the achievement of the selected goals. There was a peer learning round table, during which participants shared solutions, good practices and lessons learned from voluntary national reviews and in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. Through parallel meetings on subthemes, participants conducted an in-depth review of the progress made towards the achievement of the selected goals and the key messages.

13. Those activities allowed the Regional Forum participants to assess progress, reflect on bottlenecks and challenges and share and explore more solutions to achieve the goals, build resilience and realize lasting structural transformation and sustainable development in the region.

14. Presentations and discussions at the Regional Forum can be summarized as follows:[1]

(a) Water is critical to achieving Africa's desire for fast economic growth, which will bring into about a continent free of poverty and hunger, an aspiration that is encapsulated in the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. However, the continent lags behind in access to clean water and decent sanitation services. This has serious implications, including for the health and productivity of the people in the region and undermines their capacity to cope with various shocks. With an increasing population and demand for socioeconomic development, water resources in Africa are projected to become a source of tension, conflict, environmental degradation and vulnerability. The full and effective implementation of the African Water Vision 2025 is crucial to addressing the multiple challenges, enhancing access to water and strengthening integrated water resources management;

(b) With a 3.42 per cent rate of urban growth, the continent is projected to be predominantly urban in less than two decades. The speed and scale of urbanization, compared with other regions, not only presents opportunities for inclusive sustainable growth, but also poses challenges for African cities in planning and managing the urbanization process. Given the growing concentration of Africa's population in urban areas and the poor planning of those areas, urban centres are becoming increasingly vulnerable to disasters. An increasing number of African countries are adopting and implementing national disaster risk reduction strategies. In 2016, 30 African countries adopted or were implementing such strategies, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030. Overall, the effective achievement of Goal 11, the New Urban Agenda adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) and regional urban commitments, specifically under aspiration 4 of Agenda 2063, are critical to ensuring that urbanization becomes a driver of Africa's transformation, prosperity and improved well-being;

(c) African countries remain the most vulnerable to the impact of climate change. In the context of the selected Sustainable Development Goals, for example, it is projected that, by 2025, water availability in 9 countries, mainly in East and Southern Africa, will be less than 1,000 m^3 per person annually; 12 countries will be limited to 1,000–1,700 m^3 per person annually; and the population at risk of water stress could rise to 460 million people, mainly in West Africa;

(d) While countries in North Africa have attained nearly universal access to electricity and clean cooking, and a few countries in the rest of Africa are making good progress towards achieving universal access by 2030, most of the continent is unlikely to achieve Goal 7 under existing policies and commitments. Owing to future projected population growth in Africa, from 1.3 billion people in 2017 to 1.7 billion in 2030, almost the same number of people (590 million) are likely to be without access to electricity in 2030 as in 2016. For those who have access to electricity in sub-Saharan Africa today, the average per capita consumption remains the lowest in the world. The number of people without access to clean cooking has continued to increase, reaching 846 million in 2015. Biomass continues to play an important role in the energy transformation agenda in Africa. On the basis of current policies and commitments, the number of people without access to clean cooking will reach 900 million by 2030. Renewable electricity capacity exceeded 38 GW in 2016 (23 per cent of the total), driven mainly by developments in using wind, solar, geothermal and large-scale hydropower resources. Energy intensity remains high (6.0 MJ/USD

[1] The sources of data in the present summary and key message can be found in the background reports on the subthemes of the Regional Forum. The reports are available from the Forum website: https://www.uneca.org/arfsd2018.

in 2014), however, largely as a result of an overreliance on inefficient biomass and weak energy efficiency policies and programmes. To ensure the achievement of Goal 7 in Africa by 2030, investment of approximately $34.2 billion ($32.5 billion for electricity access and $1.7 billion for clean cooking) will be needed annually;

(e) Land, water, forests and biodiversity make multifaceted contributions to resilience and sustainable development. They are indeed a foundation for reducing vulnerability to natural hazards and for coping with social and economic shocks. More than 62 per cent of the population in Africa depends directly on ecosystem services for food, water, energy, health and livelihood needs. Those resources, however, are under serious threat from high rates of degradation and loss. For example, more than 500,000 km^2 of land in the region are known to be already degraded. This is occurring amid the shrinkage of per capita landholdings in the region. Achieving land degradation neutrality and the sustainable management and use of forests and biodiversity should be prioritized in national development planning and budgeting;

(f) Africa's rapidly growing population is expected to double to 2.5 billion by 2050 and half of its population will live in urban areas by 2035, which, combined with rising per capita consumption, will escalate requirements for employment, food, water, energy and shelter. That in turn will increase pressure on water, land, forests and biodiversity in the region. Achieving sustainable consumption and production patterns, including a step change in investment in resource-efficient and cleaner production, will thus be indispensable to achieving many of the Sustainable Development Goals and for sustainable development in the region. African countries are making important contributions to the global 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns through the implementation of the African 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Productions Patterns, approved by the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment in 2005. Shifting to green technologies on the basis of green economy strategies can contribute to reducing waste generation and associated pollution, especially of air, land and water, by manufacturing and industry;

(g) The Regional Forum was held against the backdrop of African countries coming together in March 2018 to launch the African Continental Free Trade Area. To date, 44 of the 55 African Union Heads of State and Government have signed the agreement, which, once in force, will make Africa the largest trade zone in the world. It will increase intra-African trade by 52 per cent by the year 2022. It will also give momentum to regional integration and catalyze joint and concerted efforts to tackle a wide range of issues that are critical to placing the people of Africa on a path to living in sustainable and resilient societies. The agreement will contribute to insulating the region from shocks associated with huge fluctuations in the mostly degrading global prices of Africa's exports, thereby stabilizing revenue for most countries on the continent. It will help to strengthen regional infrastructure, including by boosting energy supply. Forest and biodiversity conservation will benefit through the strengthening of regional approaches and cross-border initiatives to combat ills such as poaching and the illegal trade in wildlife. Countries therefore need to fast-track the national ratification of the agreement to pave the way for its coming into force.

15. Below are some of the key messages on the theme and subthemes of the Regional Forum, considering the challenges, progress and actions required to step up implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. These messages will constitute Africa's regional input to the 2018 high-level political forum and are intended to be used for policy dialogue, policymaking and implementation at the national, regional and global levels towards the realization of the goals set out in both agendas.

A. Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies

16. **Resilient structural transformation in Africa, in line with the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, requires integrated strategies and approaches.** Such approaches should mainstream and prioritize climate change-proofing, disaster risk reduction and the value of natural capital in key national development frameworks, including strategies, plans and budgets. In that regard, integrating green and low carbon growth into such frameworks is important.

17. **The momentum to ensure climate change adaptation and mitigation should be increased alongside the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.** The implementation of nationally determined contributions should therefore be integrated and prioritized in a joint manner with policies and programmes to achieve the Goals.

18. **Effective land use and spatial planning policies, backed by the legislation and governance mechanisms required, are essential** to ensuring that the evolving urban form of Africa's growing cities is sustainable and resilient. Curbing urban sprawl is a core priority in that regard, given the impact of the rising costs of service and infrastructure provision and dependence on car-based travel, along with limited access to transport (and thus to social and economic opportunities) and threats to agricultural land and ecosystems. Within cities, the provision of public spaces is a core element in ensuring inclusive urbanization, improved productivity and the stable economic value of urban land.

19. The African Continental Free Trade Area is a powerful tool for mobilizing resources to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and to build inclusive and resilient societies in the region. Countries therefore need to fast-track national ratification of the agreement to pave the way for its coming into force.

B. Clean water and sanitation

20. **African countries need to invest more in providing potable water access points in urban and rural communities, improved sanitation facilities to reduce open defecation, and in ensuring appropriate waste management.** Lack of investment in clean water and appropriate sanitation will increase the burden posed by poor health, thus slowing the pace of social and economic development. In order to achieve universal access to safe water and hygiene and sanitation services, it is crucial to address the challenges posed by increasing water pollution owing to an exponential rise in informal settlements in cities and poor urban planning; open defecation owing to a lack of sanitation facilities; and the indiscriminate dumping of untreated sewage and waste into bodies of water.

21. **Ensuring the conservation and integrity of water catchment ecosystems is central to maintaining the stability of the hydrological cycle and crucial to guaranteeing steady stream flow in transboundary water resources.** The stabilization of mountains and forest ecosystems, which serve as water towers, ensures a constant supply of water to both upstream and downstream countries and strengthen cooperation on transboundary water systems among riparian States.

22. **Investing more in both soft and hard climate-proofed water infrastructure will ensure a sustained water supply, enhance adaptation to seasonal variability in precipitation and build resilience to climate change-induced impacts, including slow-onset impacts.**

23. **African countries need to strengthen collaboration and sharing of experiences to ensure sustainable water resources management.**

24. **Improved access to appropriate technologies, innovative financing mechanisms and enhanced capacity in the water sector are essential for Africa to reach a new frontier of development** that includes the exploitation of the blue and green economies and the full implementation of the Paris Agreement. To that end, strengthened North-South and South-South cooperation in facilitating technology access and transfer and capacity-building will be required.

25. **There is a need to strengthen the capacity of African countries in monitoring, evaluating and reporting on progress made to increase access to safe drinking water, hygiene and sanitation.** The management and monitoring of water-related ecosystems are also paramount. It is therefore essential to increase data collection, analysis and sharing and to produce accurate and reliable information to ensure that there are effective policies, plans and programmes to bring about universal water access in Africa.

26. **Governments should prioritize investment in sanitation and hygiene by pursuing initiatives that keep girls in schools**, including by providing access to sanitation facilities for better menstrual hygiene management.

27. **The effective inclusion of young people, women, people living with disabilities, indigenous communities and all marginalized groups in decision-making is essential to the full achievement of access to water and sanitation.**

28. **Investments must be prioritized towards water and sanitation access, as well as climate information services, to enhance the resilience of societies to the impact of floods and droughts, which are critical to ending hunger and poverty and to achieving sustainable development.**

C. Affordable and clean energy

29. **Given the policies that are currently in place, it is unlikely that access to affordable and clean energy for all will be achieved in Africa by 2030.** Governments should therefore hasten and facilitate investment in diversified and secure clean energy technologies to ensure access to energy. Doing so will require that countries receive assistance in putting in place coherent policies and an enabling regulatory environment to mobilize the investment necessary, in particular from the private sector and domestic resources, in order to capitalize on falling technology costs for renewable energy. Countries should also revise existing incentive schemes to ensure that subsidies are targeted and optimized with a view to benefiting the poor and promoting the participation of young people and women in the productive use of energy.

30. **Although a few countries have made significant progress in electrification, less progress has been made with respect to clean cooking and increasing the share of modern renewables in the overall energy supply.** Peer learning and the sharing of good practices and experiences among countries in electrification (both grid and off-grid systems), clean cooking, renewable energy and energy efficiency programmes, including innovative business models and instruments, should be promoted. Coordination of the various regional and subregional programmes on energy access also needs to be strengthened to enhance synergies and the sharing of experiences.

31. **It is crucial to address data gaps and reliability, especially with regard to biomass, to better inform the tracking of progress and investment planning.** Countries need to develop greater capacity to collect and analyze energy data, harmonize data-collection methodologies and strengthen existing data-collection

systems in order to better determine and follow up on the impact that lack of access to affordable and clean energy has on various social groups, disaggregated by gender.

32. **Governments should systematically prioritize and capitalize on quick wins in energy efficiency programmes in all sectors**, including with respect to clean cooking, urbanization, industrialization, construction, transportation and power generation, transmission and distribution.

33. **Countries should promote national investments in strengthening the grid for greater efficiency and the increased penetration of variable renewable power and to promote cross-border connectivity to accelerate access to electricity through optimized generation where and when resource potential is highest and optimized consumption where and when demand is greatest.**

34. **Skills development, both soft and hard, should be at the centre of interventions to promote and accelerate energy access, thereby ensuring its sustainability.** Countries should identify and prioritize their capacity needs and put in place the investment and frameworks needed to develop in-country human and institutional capacities to undertake energy planning and management, bring about greater engagement with the private sector; expand the use of clean cooking technologies and create relevant business models. Such capacity development efforts should prioritize young people and gender participation and outcomes.

35. **Climate and disaster resilience should be fully integrated into the planning and implementation of energy infrastructure and investment.** This is especially important for hydropower systems, which are at risk from climate change and variability.

36. **It is important that Governments promote local content enhancement throughout the entire renewable energy value chain as a catalyst for the longer-term enhanced deployment of renewables with a view to expanding the socioeconomic benefits.** Particular efforts should be made to promote endogenous knowledge and systems for clean energy development and use. It is crucial to accelerate efforts to encourage innovation in energy services and promote collaborative research and development at the regional level.

37. **It is important for sustainability and impact that deployed clean energy technologies meet global standards and are fit for purpose.** Countries should put in place policies and regulatory frameworks to ensure that deployed technologies meet high standards and that energy project developers fulfil their corporate social responsibilities.

D. Sustainable cities and communities

38. **Urbanization is a multidimensional enabler of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.** Safe, resilient and sustainable cities are crucial to ensuring that urbanization is not only a driver of sustainability, but that it also plays a role in the achievement of many other Sustainable Development Goals, including those relating to poverty and inequality, economic growth and climate change. Planning and managing cities efficiently from a human rights perspective should therefore be a priority to achieve broader development that is socially inclusive, economically productive and environmentally sustainable.

39. **A strategic urban perspective in line with national development planning is an imperative.** Given its implications for overall growth and transformation, more efforts need to be undertaken to increase awareness to ensure that urbanization is integrated into national development planning from a strategic and multi-sectoral perspective that is linked to socioeconomic and sector priorities, policies and

strategies. This will ensure policy coherence of the urban and spatial dimension within the overall socioeconomic development context. In addition, given the predominantly rural population and agriculture-led economies of Africa, it is important to emphasize rural-urban linkages in policies, strategies and programmes at regional, national and local levels. A sectoral and silo approach to urbanization will not fully unleash the proven potential of urbanization to promote inclusive social and economic prosperity.

40. **Member States should leverage opportunities arising from integrated territorial development in addition to rural-urban linkages to promote sustainable rural-urban transitions and structural transformation that generate decent jobs to benefit urban and rural populations.**

41. **While urbanization requires significant financial investment in long-term planning, capacity-building and coordination, doing nothing is not an option.** Density can lower the per-capita costs of services and infrastructure, but it does not make urbanization cheap. Cities require massive public and private investments to accommodate a rapidly rising population in a compact environment. The return on urban investment is also high, especially when investment occurs within a good planning framework, is aligned with private sector investment and is paired with well-functioning revenue and land value capture tools.

42. **African countries must take advantage of the ongoing urban transition.** African cities are growing fast, but that does not make them productive. Productive cities arise when a high density of economic activities is arranged in a well laid-out and well-managed spatial economy. The prevalent phenomena of slums and informality in African cities are indicative of both the resilience and creative energy of the people and of the loss of productive opportunities owing to weak planning and investment in advance of urban growth. Nevertheless, countries can take advantage of the urban transition that is underway. Doing so will require urgent short-term and thoughtful long-term actions that are coordinated under broader national development frameworks. South-South cooperation, especially among African cities, should be further enhanced to facilitate the sharing of experiences and lessons learned at all levels, including in terms of urban planning and management, financing, capacity-building and inclusive governance.

43. **The strategic implementation of Goal 11 requires that effective national urban policies be adopted and implemented by all member States in consultation with all stakeholders**, in particular local authorities, civil society, the private sector and academia.

44. **Inclusive and efficient land management is a must.** Member States should also ensure that national, regional and municipal land use planning incorporates economic, social and environmental criteria, with a special focus on biodiversity and ecosystem protection.

45. **Strategic implementation, follow-up and reporting require robust data and statistics at the national, local and city levels.** The persistence of data paucity and insufficiently defined methodologies for measuring the economic, social and environmental dimensions of urbanization warrant the investment of more resources in data collection, disaggregation and analysis and in the dissemination of reliable data to enable effective monitoring of and reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals.

46. **Climate change and disaster risk-informed urbanization policies, strategies and investments, including disaster risk-informed national and local development strategies and plans, are critical to the creation of inclusive,**

sustainable, safe and resilient cities and human settlements. Among the major challenges is the need to promote green public spaces and urban forestry.

47. **The restoration, protection and conservation of nature within and beyond cities will ensure that urban areas continue to enjoy essential ecosystem services, including fresh water and food, in a sustainable manner and without negative effects.**

48. **Studies and research need to be undertaken to better grasp the multidimensional nature of urbanization**, including from cultural, historical, political, economic, sociological and environmental perspectives.

49. **The effective implementation of Goal 11 requires consultation and coordinated efforts among multiple stakeholders**, including line ministries from all sectors, local authorities, metropolitan authorities, national statistics offices, the private sector, academia and civil society.

50. **Capacity-building training to ensure sustainable urban planning, management and financing should be provided to all major players**, especially city technical staff, local authorities and national planners, among others.

51. **Major efforts should be made to enhance the process of decentralization undertaken in many African countries by increasing access to national resources, enhancing the potential of resource generation at the local and city levels, including through the issuance of bonds, the involvement of the diaspora and land value capture, among others. Countries need to create safe public spaces in cities, including by ensuring access to affordable means of transportation, including for women and girls and for persons with disabilities in all their diversity.** Such public spaces must be free from harassment and other forms of sexual violence towards all people, especially women and girls, regardless of migrant status.

52. **To address population growth in African cities, Governments should increase access to family planning, in line with the Maputo Plan of Action for the Operationalization of the Continental Policy Framework for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights 2016–2030, and the Catalytic Framework to End AIDS and Tuberculosis and Eliminate Malaria in Africa by 2030.**

E. Responsible consumption and production

53. **Sustainable development is threatened by unsustainable consumption and production patterns and practices.** Efforts to develop are undermined when resources are not used responsibly, resulting in the emergence of environmental challenges and the persistence of existing challenges, as is being experienced globally. This situation calls for innovative solutions, including enabling policies, innovative businesses and strategic partnerships, to promote responsible consumption and production and to address the threats to the well-being of our planet. There is therefore a need for coordinated policies, strategies and action to address the threats to sustainable development as we move towards responsible consumption and production as a means to transition to a green economy in Africa.

54. **Member States should introduce or strengthen the implementation of their sustainable consumption and production strategies, in particular in the thematic areas not yet exploited or currently underexploited.** Such thematic areas include resource efficiency and cleaner production, sustainable lifestyles, strategic investment in resource-efficient cities, sustainable public procurement and sustainable tourism. There is a need to strengthen existing institutional frameworks in that regard, ideally at both the national and supranational levels.

55. **The safeguarding and implementation of responsible management of Africa's natural resources, on which most growth is predicated, should remain a priority.** Resource efficiency to reduce waste in production and consumption and maintaining the structure and functions of ecosystems should be at the core of a shift to sustainable consumption and production patterns. A green economy policy framework will impose costs on inefficient production and consumption practices and provide incentives for the private sector to change its operations in ways that will contribute to sustainable development.

56. **The food lost in Africa could feed the millions of people who are hungry or malnourished. Saving just one quarter of the food lost or wasted globally could also end hunger in the world.** To achieve that target, several interventions are needed at various levels, especially in the agricultural production and post-harvest handling stages. Governments need to conduct comprehensive evaluations, with the ultimate goal of reducing inefficiency in food supply chains. They should also be proactive in bridging the huge policy deficiencies related to influencing the underlying behaviours that are the primary drivers of unsustainable consumption and production.

57. **Many countries have intensified their efforts to reduce hazardous waste generation, to promote the environmentally sound management of such waste, to strengthen restrictions on its transboundary movement, in accordance with principles of environmentally sound management, and to increase transparency in the regulatory systems permitting such movement.** Nevertheless, countries should strengthen their scientific capacity to ascertain the hazardous potential of waste and materials that are transferred or exchanged within their jurisdictions.

58. **There is also a need to accelerate the implementation of the Bamako Convention on the Ban of the Import into Africa and the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes within Africa.** The success of African and global conventions on the control of transboundary movement and management of hazardous waste depends on the concerted efforts of and collaboration among all States, not only those that are adversely affected by such waste. Countries should therefore adopt national policies and strategies for dealing with hazardous waste and for engaging with other member States in that regard.

59. **The linking of sustainable consumption and production patterns with most of the other Sustainable Development Goals requires that specific attention be placed on national capacity development and on data generation, data utilization and data sharing to adequately highlight the various benefits to African countries of mainstreaming sustainable consumption and production patterns into their national statistics and reporting frameworks.** Specific focus needs to be placed on strengthening institutions to provide reliable and up-to-date environmental data, given that the availability of disaggregated environmental data will allow member States to substantively report on, advocate and decide upon ways to reframe economic policies and practices around sustainable consumption and production patterns at the macroeconomic and sectoral levels.

60. **The shift to sustainable consumption and production patterns will require the massive use by member States of an integrated approach that necessitates, among other things, interministerial coordination and the involvement of non-traditional actors.** That will translate the multifaceted dimension of sustainable consumption and production patterns into relevant national development outcomes through engagement in strategic activities that support sustainable consumption and production patterns on various fronts, including pricing, the protection of intellectual property rights and the provision of goods and services within regions and across boundaries. The understanding of those actors of how sustainability can help to achieve development goals needs to be significantly improved so that they can offer

the budgetary and national policy support required to enable the broader implementation of sustainable consumption and production patterns in a cross-government and multi-ministerial manner.

61. **Governments must develop and implement programmes for skills development at all levels of education that support sustainable consumption and production and green industrialization.** They should also create a conducive environment that enhances and supports the initiatives of non-State actors, including the private sector, labour, local communities and civil society, on sustainable consumption and production. In addition, the transfer of clean technologies and the promotion of centres focused on clean development should be priority.

F. Life on land

62. **Investment to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 15 will contribute to the realization of all the other goals set out in the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.** This is because the attainment of those goals is inseparably linked to the existence, productivity and sustainability of life on land. Accordingly, there is an urgent need for African countries, multilateral and bilateral partners and other relevant stakeholders to substantially increase investment to take action on the ground to combat land degradation, support large-scale ecosystem restoration and enhance the productivity and resilience of all types of ecosystems and genetic resources in Africa. Such actions should include measures to further strengthen ongoing efforts to end poaching and illicit trafficking of wildlife.

63. **Achieving the ambition to sustainably manage land, forests and biodiversity, in line with the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, requires that African Governments translate high-level policies and strategic goals into tangible national actions and outcomes on the ground.** This includes the accelerated implementation of related global and regional treaties and frameworks at the national, subnational and local levels. To be effective, such implementation should be undertaken through integrated and cross-sectoral approaches, in particular at the landscape level. In that regard, the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel initiative offers an opportunity to scale up ecosystem restoration and build the resilience of communities. There is also a need to develop and implement large-scale regional programmes on biodiversity and economic development, including the Security, Stability and Sustainability initiative, in the member States concerned.

64. **Funding, capacity development and technology support linked to achieving on-the-ground outcomes need to be scaled up to implement national biodiversity strategies and action plans, land degradation neutrality targets, ecosystem restoration, sustainable forest management programmes and other ecosystem management plans.** Doing so will benefit from the enhanced exchange of good practices, lessons learned, innovations and technologies, and will be developed with an emphasis on the input of those from the region.

65. **Tools and processes for integrating the sustainable use and management of natural capital into strategic regional, subregional and national development policies and other frameworks need to be strengthened and implemented.** Such tools are urgently needed to, in particular, integrate nature's contribution to people and economies into priority development frameworks for agricultural transformation, the expansion of trade and the development of urban centres, industries and infrastructure, including energy, water and transport infrastructure. National capital accounting initiatives, such as those already carried out by the majority of countries that are signatories to the Gaborone Declaration for Sustainability in Africa, need to be scaled up and replicated in the region.

66. **It is crucial to strengthen rights and access to land resources and participative approaches to the management of land, freshwater, forests and biodiversity.** In that regard, countries need to scale up the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security. It is particularly important to enhance access and participation by indigenous peoples, local communities and various groups, including women and young people. This is central to ensuring equitable benefit-sharing and that no one is left behind. Countries therefore need to strengthen their land governance, including resource tenure systems. Doing so should contribute to efforts to combat land grabbing.

67. **Lack of and poor access to data and information on land and ecosystems contribute to unbalanced reporting on progress, inadequate awareness and insufficient national policy attention to and actions for the sustainable management of these resources.** In that regard, it is vital for countries to strengthen their capacity to collect, manage and disseminate data and information on environment-related sectors as an integral priority of national statistics systems. Moreover, countries need to make use of other available information, including from national reports on global and regional obligations, and data collected by the research community, the private sector, local communities and civil society. In particular, countries need to expand the availability and use of relevant information and knowledge to inform national policymaking and implementation. Assessments conducted by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services provide a springboard for expanding the availability of such information.

68. **Countries need to strengthen their engagement with the business community to better incorporate natural capital issues into corporate policies, standards and practices to enhance conservation and the sustainable management of ecosystems.** Such engagement is necessary to expand investment in the implementation of various Sustainable Development Goals.

69. **It is necessary to work with other regions and stakeholders to develop a new and ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework.** That framework should include harmonized indicators, requirements for financial instruments, along with capacity-building and communication strategies to inform the review and updating of a number of targets under Goal 15 that are due to expire in 2020.

70. **There is a need to enhance high-level political commitment and to generate momentum to accelerate implementation in order to achieve ecosystem-related targets within the time frame that has been set and to develop a new and ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework.** To do so, a global summit at the Heads of State level needs to be convened to raise the political and economic profile of biodiversity and ecosystem services and to raise awareness of their importance in achieving the 2030 Agenda and in supporting the implementation of Agenda 2063. The fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity will take place in November 2018 in Egypt, and all African countries are encouraged to actively participate at the highest level and contribute to discussions, including during the ministerial segment.

G. Strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the partnership for sustainable development

71. **National statistics offices, supported by development partners, need to strengthen their statistics development systems, data gathering and management**

plans to support the monitoring and reporting requirements of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 in a harmonized and integrated manner, in particular by:

(a) Enhancing national statistics systems, including national statistics bureaus and sectoral statistics services;

(b) Enhancing the capacity of users of statistical data;

(c) Adjusting and reorienting national statistics development strategies to manage data related to the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals and the goals of Agenda 2063, including through the disaggregation of data on specific population groups (e.g., women, children, persons with disabilities and young people) so as to leave no one behind;

(d) Promoting access to financing to acquire the technologies needed to produce high-quality data.

72. **Long-term planning, policy coordination, monitoring of progress and impact evaluations are needed to identify what works in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals on the continent and to address policy failures and gaps with respect to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063**, in particular by:

(a) Aligning the 2030 Agenda with Agenda 2063 at the national, sectoral, regional and local levels;

(b) Promoting inclusive planning and strengthening the participation of vulnerable groups, including women, persons with disabilities, the elderly and young people;

(c) Strengthening monitoring, assessment and reporting functions, in particular through analysis, modelling and forecasting;

(d) Promoting civilian oversight (e.g., by civil society, the media and non-governmental organizations) of the implementation of public policies.

73. **Science and technology innovation should drive inclusive and sustainable development. Special emphasis should be placed on including women and girls, young people and vulnerable groups.**

74. **Investment in research and development should be considerably increased and attention should be given to the development of climate information and services, resilient infrastructure and green industrialization capacity.**

75. **Science and technology innovation-focused partnerships among African countries are central to the achievement of the goals.** Such partnerships should focus on mobilizing and sharing knowledge and expertise and technology transfer.

76. Partnerships with the private sector to support the translation of research outputs into innovations that can be scaled up to respond to the Sustainable Development Goals should be strengthened.

77. **Technology should be harnessed to improve data collection, analysis and dissemination, as well as to promote evidence-informed policymaking.** Technology should also be used to create open digital platforms to enable citizens to have global access to information.

78. **The creation of a multi-stakeholder forum in Africa on science and technology innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals, held in the margins of the annual Africa Regional Forum for Sustainable Development, will enable African countries to build and strengthen partnerships, identify African science and technology innovation needs and gaps and assist Africa in**

coordinating its representation at the annual multi-stakeholder forum on science and technology innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals and at the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

79. **The creation of an African platform for research and innovation exchange will enable the dissemination of Goal-relevant African research and innovation to Governments and citizens.** It could form the basis for linking researchers and innovators with the funding required to scale up their work. The proposed platform would showcase and share Africa's efforts to develop Goal-relevant research and innovation and could be coordinated with the Global Innovation Exchange.

80. **It is important to reaffirm that the 2030 Agenda recognizes the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.** For African countries, it is important that their different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respect for national policies and priorities be taken into consideration in relation to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals on the continent. The means of implementation, including financial assistance through continued official development assistance, remain vital. Developed countries must honour their historic obligations and responsibilities in this regard, as part of the global commitment to revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

81. **Revitalizing the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development can only be fully achieved if supported by the concrete policies and actions outlined in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, which is an integral part of the 2030 Agenda.** The full implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda is therefore critical to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals and their targets in Africa.

82. **It is important for Africa that the global community effectively address illicit financial flows and the negative consequences that arise from them.** It is estimated that $50–60 billion leaves the continent in illicit financial flows annually. Multinational corporations and other such entities, most of which are based in developed countries, should make their rightful contributions in the African countries where their revenues are generated.

83. **African countries and their development partners should ensure that adequate funding is allocated to projects and programmes for vulnerable groups.**

84. **Africa must devise additional strategies for its development while avoiding increases in its external and domestic debt.**

85. **Integrated approaches and strengthened partnerships in sustainable land, forest and biodiversity management should be pursued as an important strategy for mobilizing the means of implementation.** Financing and capacity development for implementation should be mainstreamed into innovative mechanisms, such as those to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and to promote conservation, sustainable management of forests and the enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries, such as the Green Climate Fund, the Global Environment Facility and the Land Degradation Neutrality Fund.

86. **Recognizing that global trade is key to achieving the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, Governments should ensure that trade agreements are consistent with and promote commitment to gender equality, human rights obligations, the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, as well as other international and regional frameworks.**

87. **The African Continental free Trade Area must receive strong governance, financial and overall support for the innovative and effective implementation of an inclusive African Continental Free Trade Area.**

88. **Investment in the development of African markets should promote greater access for African exporters on the basis of their comparative advantage and without being burdened by subsidies in developed countries.**

89. **Gender equality and women's access to trade benefits should be promoted by systematically integrating gender analysis and human rights impact assessments into trade policies at the international, regional and national levels that recognize women's informal trade activities, their contributions and their vulnerabilities.**

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Input from the 2018 edition of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development

Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat hereby transmits the input from the 2018 edition of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, held in Beirut from 24 to 26 April 2018 on the theme "Natural resources, future generations and the common good", to the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

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Report of the 2018 edition of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development

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Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), under the patronage of the Lebanese Prime Minister, Mr. Saad Hariri, and in collaboration with the League of Arab States and other United Nations organizations operating in the Arab region, organized the 2018 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (AFSD) on the theme "Natural resources, future generations and the common good", which was held in Beirut from 24 to 26 April 2018. Lebanon chaired the Forum, which was opened by Mr. Ghattas Khoury, the Lebanese Minister of Culture, representing the Prime Minister.

2. The AFSD is a high-level regional platform for reviewing and following up on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region. The Doha Declaration on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, emanating from the twenty-ninth ESCWA session (Doha, 13–15 December 2016), enshrines the Forum as an annual meeting of Arab Governments and sustainable development stakeholders to consider national and regional experiences and the implementation mechanisms of the 2030 Agenda at the national and regional levels.[1] The outcomes of the Arab Forum are submitted to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).

3. The 2018 Arab Forum was preceded by six regional preparatory meetings, namely: the Arab High-level Forum on the World Summit on the Information Society and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Beirut, 8–12 May 2017); the Regional Seminar for Parliamentarians on the 2030 Agenda (Beirut, 8–9 November 2017); the Arab Preparatory Meeting on Energy-related Issued for the 2018 AFSD and the HLPF (Beirut, 27–28 March 2018); the Arab Preparatory Meeting on Water Issues for the 2018 AFSD and the HLPF (Beirut, 28–29 March 2018); the Arab Preparatory Meeting on Environmental and Natural Resources Issues for the 2018 AFSD and the HLPF (Cairo, 11–12 April 2018); and the Regional Meeting of Civil Society on Sustainable Development in the Arab Region (Beirut, 22–23 April 2018) (see annex to the present report).

4. The 2018 Arab Forum coincided with the third year of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. More Arab countries have begun adapting their national plans and strategies to the 2030 Agenda, establishing the necessary institutional structures to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the national level, and designing follow-up and review mechanisms at the national and regional levels.

5. The Forum's work programme included plenary sessions on the main theme "Natural resources, future generations and the common good", the means of implementation at the regional level and national experiences in implementing the 2030 Agenda; and special sessions focusing on priority issues for the Arab region.

[1] The Forum derives its terms of reference from a series of ESCWA resolutions, including resolution 327 (XXIX) on the working mechanisms of the AFSD adopted at the twenty-ninth ESCWA session (Doha, 13–15 December 2016), resolution 314 (XXVIII) on the AFSD adopted at the twenty-eighth ESCWA session (Tunis, 15–18 September 2014), and Executive Committee resolution 322 on a strategy and plan of action on the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development adopted by the Committee at its second meeting (Amman, 14–16 December 2015).

6. Participants in the 2018 AFSD agreed on several key messages for submission to the HLPF, which will be held in New York from 9 to 18 July 2018 on the theme "Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies". The outcomes of the Arab Forum will also be presented at the thirtieth ESCWA session and at the fifth meeting of the ESCWA Executive Committee.

I. Key messages from the 2018 AFSD

A. General messages

1. Confirm the Arab region's development priorities as presented in the outcomes of previous Arab Forum sessions since 2014.

2. Affirm the key messages emanating for the 2017 Arab Forum submitted to the 2017 High-level Political Forum, and the need to implement the practical recommendations therein[2] and to renew commitments to the objectives of regional general and sectoral forums on the 2030 Agenda and to the recommendations made at the Arab Forum's regional preparatory meetings.

3. Stress the effectiveness of regional participatory work between United Nations organizations operating in the Arab region, the League of Arab States and all governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, such as the private sector, banks, funds, civil society organizations, academia, research centres and media organizations, so as to unify the Arab region's positions on implementing and following up on the 2030 Agenda.

4. Affirm the principle of real participation, integration and coordination between institutions and all stakeholders at the national and regional levels by adopting mechanisms and frameworks that strengthen stakeholder participation in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

5. Call for establishing the foundations of democracy and for effective political participation from political parties, parliaments, civil society, the private sector, academia and the media, given that governance built on the principles of human rights, participation, transparency, integrity and accountability enhances national ownership and people's involvement in the development process.

6. Monitor the current situation in the Arab region and its repercussions for human beings and the natural environment in development planning, while taking into account social, environmental, economic, cultural and political changes and with reference to data, policies and mechanisms.

7. Reduce social, economic and cultural disparities in handling natural and environmental resources to enable all social groups to tackle natural phenomena, such as climate change, desertification and floods; and uphold people's right to access information and justice, have their voice and concerns heard by decision-makers, and impact the equitable management, use and distribution of natural resources.

8. Stress the important role of civil society in calling for social justice and the protection of human rights as pivotal goals and fundamental principles for exacting transformative change in the Arab region's sustainable development approach.

9. Confirm the critical importance of investing in young people as a significant demographic dividend, and a key pillar for achieving the SDGs. This requires their empowerment and participation in all economic, social, environmental, cultural and

[2] https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/arab-forum-sustainable-development-2017-final-report-en.pdf.

political dimensions, as principal contributors to raising human capital, keeping pace with global developments and building a diverse economy based on science, knowledge and innovation.

10. Underscore the importance of the relationship between the scientific community and decision-makers and of strengthening communication between them; support scientific research and competitiveness and humanities and social sciences that assist in linking the various dimensions of development, and in formulating development policies and approaches and monitoring their impact on people, societies and common cultural heritage; and call for the establishment of a committee comprising Arab scientists from various professional backgrounds to provide guidance to decision-makers.

11. Work on formulating curriculums in line with current developments to raise citizens who are active in their societies, and enable them to fully achieve their aspirations and become the driving force towards transformative change; and review the cultural dimension of sustainable development and enshrine development as a human right and as a process for ensuring sustainability and a decent life for current and future generations.

B. Implementing and following up on the 2030 Agenda: Arab countries' perspective

2030 Agenda from Arab countries' perspective

12. Formulate development plans based on clear and comprehensive visions that take into account interlinkages between issues, and follow a phased application process in the short, medium and long terms to ensure that those plans are flexible and updateable in the light of periodic evaluations and national and regional developments.

13. Work on raising awareness and standardizing concepts and discourse through cooperation and coordination within Government and between its institutions to ensure that the 2030 Agenda is seen as an integrated development programme; and build upon and restructure existing institutional frameworks and mechanisms, if required, and strengthen the capacity of their cadres rather than developing parallel systems that might restrict institutional coordination and cooperation efforts.

14. Build institutional capacity and increase communication between Government, financial institutions and the public and private sectors and forge fruitful partnerships between them; enhance transparency, accountability, oversight, data collection systems, information exchange and support for the role of scientific and research institutions; promote dialogue and cooperation between sectors; and strengthen local governance.

15. Identify institutional frameworks that regulate between governmental and non-governmental bodies to guarantee periodic cooperation and partnership on sustainable development issues.

16. Confirm the importance of public budgets as a tool for translating national plans and strategies into implementable and sustainable development projects, while stressing the need to follow a real participatory approach, especially by involving parliament in developing, implementing and monitoring government budgets.

17. Strengthen Arab parliaments' oversight role by raising awareness of development plans and programmes, and by developing tools to monitor government work through checks and balances, inquiries and parliamentary committees.

18. Affirm that data gaps, weak statistics systems and data analysis are major challenges facing Arab countries in identifying national priorities, goals and targets in line with their situations and aspirations.

19. Focus on the regional dimension of sustainable development and the need to strengthen coordination, cooperation, integration and solidarity between Arab countries, given that development issues such as environmental challenges, water resources, energy and migration, including brain drain, are joint issues that require real regional partnerships that effectively contribute to supporting the Arab least developed countries and conflict-affected countries.

20. Intensify regional efforts to promote peace and the rebuilding of war-damaged countries and areas, and support humanitarian and development initiatives in countries facing severe crises resulting from displacement, by adopting interim solutions and policies covering social, environmental, political and economic issues.

21. Stress the importance of investing in local development work through a participatory approach that contributes to preserving the social fabric and promoting reconciliation.

Follow-up and review at the national level, including voluntary national reviews

22. Recognize that voluntary national reviews are not only a mechanism to follow up on national development efforts, and that they entail more than the preparation of national reports. They are a catalyst for long-term participatory work, a tool to reformulate partners' roles and to identify their cooperation mechanisms, and an opportunity to consider achievements, identify gaps, assess weaknesses and ensure that the development process is on the right track.

23. Acknowledge that developing an approach covering all government sectors requires tackling disparities in understanding sustainable development plans and in interactions between different sectors and government bodies to prepare for drafting voluntary national reviews, while taking into account the importance of raising awareness, standardizing the development discourse, and avoiding multiple coordinators of the review process at the national level.

24. Underscore the need for Governments to involve all stakeholders, including local governments, civil society, the private sector, parliament and houses of expertise, in all preparatory stages of voluntary national reviews, namely in the planning process and in collecting information to draft the reviews, and not only in revising the final drafts.

25. Consider a mechanism for selecting civil society organizations to participate in the voluntary national review process and in preparing a report for submission at the High-level Political Forum to ensure the adoption of a participatory approach that also preserves those organizations' independence.

26. Confirm the importance of mainstreaming gender equality in the development and evaluation of national and regional sustainable development programmes, and in preparing voluntary national reviews for submission at the High-level Political Forum.

27. Strengthen the role of data producers and develop statistical approaches in line with global indicators, and formulate and adopt methodologies to evaluate policy effectiveness that complement the analytical process.

28. Affirm the role of volunteers in preparing national reviews, especially regarding information provision and collection since they are the most familiar with the situation on the ground in various sectors.

29. Confirm the role of the AFSD as a platform for exchanging experiences and lessons, and for benefiting from knowledge accumulated since 2016 from voluntary national reviews, the guidelines issued by the Secretary-General and the handbook on preparing voluntary national reviews, among other tools.

C. Natural resources, the sustainable development goals and future generations from an Arab perspective

30. Focus on priorities and challenges facing natural resources, especially increasing demand for them because of climate change, water shortages, desertification, flooding, population growth, voluntary and forced displacement and difficult security situations caused by war and occupation, which all impact food, water and energy security, while taking into account the need to conserve them for future generations.

31. Affirm the principles of equality and justice in the use, management and distribution of natural resources, especially regarding women since they are mostly responsible for managing water and energy at the household level; focus on the environmental damage caused by the degradation of natural resources and their misuse; and encourage joint action to reduce inequality in natural resource distribution at the national level.

32. Underscore the role of cultural change in moving towards inclusive government policies and sustainable individual practices, including stopping waste, rationalizing natural resources, enhancing a sense of ownership towards natural resources and supporting vocational training, especially in fields related to water, energy, agriculture and the environment, to alter consumption and management patterns and to preserve resources as a shared responsibility that concerns not only Governments but all social groups and individuals.

33. Stress the importance of identifying effective mechanisms to support and facilitate dialogue and coordination between Arab countries on natural resource management, especially shared resources, to promote projects and initiatives on Arab integration, to meet the needs of refugees, displaced populations and host communities when possible, and to cooperate in preparing reconstruction efforts based on sustainable energy systems.

34. Promote the role of young people as development actors and involve them in formulating policies and in follow-up, monitoring and accountability processes on sustainable development issues; and recognize their role in reconstruction and environmental conservation efforts as a key factor for peace and social cohesion with regard to shared natural resources and the common good.

35. Confirm that the sustainable management of natural resources entails upholding populations' right to control their resources, notably the State of Palestine does not enjoy that right because of the Israeli occupation that also diminishes the sovereignty of neighbouring Arab countries over their land and natural resources, especially water; and request the United Nations to launch negotiations and discussions on international instruments regarding water resources, the sovereignty of Arab States over their resources, the resolution of conflicts over shared water resources, and urging the international community to uphold its responsibilities in that regard.

36. Establish an Arab higher authority on water, energy and food, and support it through technical methods that enable it to consider interrelated issues that strengthen food, water and energy security; and propose recommendations and practical solutions to decision-makers and regional and national strategy developers.

Water

37. Strive to achieve water security in the Arab region at the level of households and local communities, at the subnational, national and regional levels and between countries, to guarantee the provision of and access to sufficient clean water and sanitation services for all.

38. Confirm that understanding the humanitarian dimension of water security assists in ensuring that no one is left behind in development plans, and limits disparities in providing water services that are exacerbated by conflict, crisis, occupation and poverty, in addition to climate change and reliance on transboundary water resources.

39. Guide and operationalize efforts aimed at overcoming water shortages in the Arab region, with reference to the SDGs, indicators, targets and sex disaggregated data, including SDG 6.4 indicators that measure changes in the number of people facing water scarcity.

40. Highlight the interlinkages between SDGs related to water as a principal resource for achieving food security, ensuring health, supporting sustainable cities and ecosystems, preserving energy resources, and achieving peace.

41. Advocate for people's right to water and sanitation services, and call for legal frameworks guaranteeing water rights.

42. Affirm the role of scientific research and domestic innovation in supporting efforts to achieve the water-related SDGs, including innovative technologies that promote the development of non-traditional water resources in the Arab region.

43. Stress the importance of participation and partnerships and international funding, in addition to capacity-building and preparing for natural disasters such as drought and floods, as key factors for achieving water security in the Arab region.

Sustainable energy

44. Underscore the need for Arab economies to move towards sustainable energy, while taking into account disparities in country priorities resulting from the conditions they face, given that business-as-usual in the fields of energy and natural resource management in the Arab region is not sustainable.

45. Highlight the need to consider renewable energy from a regional perspective, rather than from that of individual countries, to achieve an optimal share of renewable energy in the energy mix.

46. Stress the need to strengthen cooperation and trade between Arab countries, advance domestic manufacturing of the elements of clean energy technologies, network between Arab countries, and promote Arab integration projects and initiatives, such as an Arab common electricity market, while focusing on smart grids and green corridors.

47. Advocate the development of integrated and proactive policies and regulatory and legislative frameworks to enable the rapid implementation of measures for efficient energy use and the dissemination of renewable energy to assist the Arab region in moving towards more sustainable use of its natural resources.

48. Attract financial support from donor countries and institutions and international funding to finance joint national and regional programmes and projects to move towards more sustainable energy systems, and forge fruitful partnerships that are compatible with national goals and domestic funding mechanisms.

49. Highlight the need to intensify capacity-building programmes for cadres working in the field of renewable energy and energy efficiency, especially regarding the preparation of feasibility studies and the provision of suitable financing.

50. Confirm the need to follow a rights-based approach in the development process, and to mainstream gender equality and women's empowerment in energy projects and encourage women to become entrepreneurs, so as to reduce poverty and improve health and the environment.

Environment

51. Stress the importance of mitigating the negative effects of economic growth on the environment by evaluating the environmental impact of development projects, including through strategic environmental evaluation of economic and development planning that Governments and financial institutions undertake; and incorporate issues of biodiversity and natural resources into development planning given their key role in sustainable development.

52. Underscore the need to preserve biodiversity and follow an integrated approach to natural resource management, given that natural resource depletion both leads to and results from conflict and displacement, which requires identifying mechanisms that prevent land degradation and desertification so as to reduce pressure on populations and services and preserve peace.

53. Focus on rapid and unregulated urbanization under the framework of international treaties for the protection of ecosystems and biodiversity. Urbanization causes environmental degradation and biodiversity loss, and affects people's health and wellbeing and economic and environmental growth.

54. Since environmental and natural resource issues are transboundary, focus on a participatory approach to implementing the SDGs, benefit from lessons learned and experiences, and strengthen data availability and collection for monitoring and evaluation purposes, especially regarding SGDs that are directly and indirectly related to the environment and natural resources.

55. Stress the importance of investing in disaster risk reduction and in post-disaster reconstruction to build resilience to disasters and adapt to their future impact.

56. Confirm the importance of establishing and institutionalizing national high committees on disaster risk reduction, comprising all national stakeholders including governmental organizations, regional and national non-governmental institutions, civil society organizations covering all specializations, and scientific research centres.

57. Develop national strategies and action plans on disaster risk reduction, and coordinate data collection from all bodies represented in committees to report progress in achieving the global targets of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction through an electronic monitoring system whose indicators are linked to the SDG indicators.

58. Underscore the importance of establishing national databases on disaster losses that occurred over the 10 years before the adoption of the Sendai Framework (2005-2015) so as to facilitate analyses of disaster risk patterns and trends, identify priorities in disaster risk evaluation, and develop the necessary strategies and plans to limit disasters, adapt to and mitigate their future impact and undertake reconstruction so as to build resilience against future disasters.

D. Priority issues at the regional level

Economic diversification

59. Confirm the importance of adopting a sustainable development approach built on economic diversification, addressing consumption patterns and strengthening sustainable production in view of the challenges facing Arab countries, including economic pressures, demographic changes including from migration and displacement, and the depletion of natural resource such as oil, water and agricultural land.

60. Highlight the importance of developing new sustainable development approaches through economic policy reform, formulating policies to grow the digital economy and promote innovation, strengthening the private sector (especially small and medium enterprises), attracting investment, and ensuring environmental security and social justice.

61. Stress the importance of involving a broad group of stakeholders in formulating sustainable policies on economic diversification, including local governments, the private sector and civil society.

62. Underscore the need for the Arab region to benefit from the continuing industrial revolution by investing in science and technology and strengthening regional cooperation and integration to build capacity and mobilize efforts and resources.

63. Agree on the need to reform education systems as a necessary prerequisite to achieving economic diversification given their strong links to innovation and manufacturing, and to fully benefiting from the digital economy.

64. Stimulate innovation for development by establishing an integrated national innovation system, developing specific initiatives and new approaches in all economic sectors to support small and medium enterprises and incorporate them into the formal economy, and transforming the informal economy (which is widespread in the Arab region) into a formal economy.

65. Highlight the importance of active participation in the Fourth Industrial Revolution and new jobs, expedite the adaptation and modernization of education systems and outputs, promote science and technology and harness them to ensure creativity and entrepreneurship, and stress the need to involve the private sector in those efforts.

Planning for resilient, inclusive and sustainable cities

66. Stress that good city planning benefits everyone equally, including migrants, refugees, the displaced and other vulnerable social groups. It requires mechanisms that guarantee the public's participation in general discussions and a review of laws and legislation that discriminate against certain social groups.

67. Highlight the need to devise solutions and policies to tackle the issue of city land being transformed from a common good to a commodity, and to move from economies based on real estate speculation that exclude large segments of society towards social solidarity economies that meet the needs of all social groups.

68. Underscore the need to make cities healthier by adopting an integrated approach that includes all sectors and stakeholders to develop ideas, identify priorities and monitor progress, starting from the strong links between human health, the various sustainable development dimensions, ownership and social responsibility.

69. Stress the importance of reconstructing war-damaged cities in a sustainable manner; take into account the needs of displaced populations, minorities and

marginalized groups; focus on providing education, health and other basic services that contribute to social cohesion; and make sustainable use of archaeological and environmental wealth to stimulate the economy and tourism.

70. Urge decision-makers to devise solutions and adopt new techniques to measure economic, social and environmental changes at the city level such as the Urban Poverty Index that measures poverty in cities, adopt appropriate solutions for the domestic context, and benefit from successful experiences in reducing inequality and achieving balanced, sustainable and inclusive development for all.

Financing inclusive and sustainable development

71. Confirm that securing financing for sustainable development depends on the advancement of the economic system to build national capacity and ensure the fair distribution of wealth, to strengthen the private sector and reform the tax system, to promote economic sovereignty and the shift towards a productive economy rather than a consumer economy, and to develop effective partnerships between different actors, including Governments, banks and financial institutions, the private sector, civil society and the international community.

72. Emphasize the importance of economic diversification and of engaging with the private sector, and support and forge international and regional partnerships to secure funding, particularly for Arab countries facing difficulty in securing the required funding for sustainable development because of decreasing international development assistance and its focus on security and humanitarian aid, economic fluctuations, high public debt, and weak foreign trade that is governed by unfair rules.

73. Stress the importance of facilitating migrant remittance transfer and encourage their investment in development projects in countries of origin.

74. Underscore the need to develop public budgets, employ international standards in their preparation, enhance their transparency, and promote participation in their development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation to reduce corruption and waste, in addition to establishing a legal framework to limit tax evasion and facilitate access to information.

75. Stress the necessity of promoting the private sector's role in achieving sustainable development by creating an enabling environment for investment through legislation and institutional reform; and confirm the need to adopt human rights standards governing the private sector with regard to transparency and responsibility to guide its involvement in the development process.

76. Highlight banks' role in enhancing investor confidence, including through initiatives to encourage banks that finance development projects, providing the necessary data and expertise to enable banks to assess the profitability of development projects, financial literacy, and shifting private sector involvement in the development process from corporate social responsibility to profitability so as to encourage investment.

77. Agree on the importance of adopting an integrated system to combat corruption so as to reform the financial and economic systems, and develop regulations and banking laws to recover stolen assets and invest them in development plans and projects.

78. Emphasize the need to bridge the knowledge gap, through studies on international and Arab experiences in corporate social responsibility and their development impact, in securing financing to achieve development, and in producing data on key indicators.

79. Stress the importance of enhancing cooperation and coordination with funding sources, especially those in the Arab region, particularly sovereign funds, Islamic finance and zakat funds, and their role in supporting sustainable development.

Civil society's role in sustainable development

80. Highlight that civil society organizations participating in the 2018 AFSD adopted the outputs and recommendations of the Regional Meeting of Civil Society on Sustainable Development in the Arab Region, held in Beirut on 22 and 23 April 2018.

81. Agree on establishing a platform for civil society organizations operating in the Arab region, as a regional mechanism that strengthens civil society organizations' role in sustainable development, in following up on the implementation of national plans, including the 2030 Agenda, at the national and regional levels, and in scrutinizing Governments.

82. Emphasize the importance of good governance, transparency and self-monitoring in government and non-government sectors, including civil society organizations and the private sector.

83. Stress the need to enhance the operating environment of civil society organizations, and build their capacity to effectively participate in sustainable development and decision-making processes.

Women's empowerment and mainstreaming gender equality to preserve natural resources and achieve the common good

84. Underscore the need to take into account gender issues in all legislative frameworks and laws, and strengthen accountability to achieve gender equality at all government levels to implement the 2030 Agenda.

85. Focus on the importance of disseminating the concept of gender equality in national development plans and the SDGs, and involve women in decision-making and policy formulation regarding water, energy, cities, production, consumption, regional ecosystems and means of implementation, given their role in water and energy management at the household level, to ensure that women and girls are not excluded from the development process because of vulnerability, and to invest their abilities in achieving the 2030 Agenda.

86. Stress the need to effectively involve women in urban planning to enable them to express their concerns and needs, and to take women into consideration when formulating plans so as to strengthen their social and economic participation.

87. Improve the availability and quality of sex-disaggregated data given the region's need for better analytical approaches that contribute to developing gender-sensitive policies and mainstreaming them into efforts to empower women and achieve gender equality.

Young people's role in moving towards sustainable Arab societies

88. Welcome and commend intensive youth participation in the 2018 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, pursuant to recommendations made at previous forums, as a positive step towards their participation as a key component in achieving the SDGs.

89. Confirm that unemployment, education and the absence of social justice are priorities and a source of concern for young people in the Arab region; and call for the fundamental reform of countries' economic structures to provide decent

employment opportunities for young people today and in the future in view of demographic changes and the increased share of young people in Arab societies.

90. Agree on the need to formulate and commit to an integrated human rights and policy framework in tackling all youth issues, which upholds and protects basic freedoms and human rights without overlooking vulnerable or marginalized groups and guarantees equal opportunities for all; and intensify efforts to reach young people in rural areas as they are key to achieving positive change, peace and stability.

91. Affirm the family's role in developing a culture of democracy among young people, often excluded from decision-making processes, despite the importance of their issues in the 2030 Agenda, because of a lack of participatory policies and frameworks, on the one hand, and the reluctance of young people to participate in the political process, on the other. Rapid action is therefore required to build and enhance trust between young people and the State, based on citizenship, freedom and participation.

92. Emphasize the media's role as an advocate for youth issues, thus entailing increased interaction with the media to ensure that it adopts youth issues and to stimulate its role in that regard; and invite the media to publish youth initiatives and innovation in implementing the SDGs.

93. Encourage Arab parliaments to allocate budget resources to youth development and to building their skills to face challenges and devise innovative solutions to them.

94. Agree that Security Council resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security with its five pillars, especially the protection pillar, represents a basic and appropriate framework for young people in the Arab region; and urge countries to raise awareness of the resolution at all levels, open local and national channels of dialogue with young people, and involve them in conceptualizing its implementation.

95. Identify clear steps towards establishing a regional network that influences the formulation and implementation of national and regional policies on young people, including forming an Arab youth delegation to participate in United Nations official events on the 2030 Agenda, providing platforms to discuss and support youth-led organizations, and promote partnerships, networking, communication and skills-building.

The principle of 'leaving no one behind' in the Arab region

96. Confirm that the principle of 'leaving no one behind' is a key pillar of the 2030 Agenda that cannot be implemented without inclusive public policies guaranteed by international law and human rights standards.

97. Affirm that the principle of 'leaving no one behind' is a major challenge facing Arab countries, especially regarding vulnerable groups and people living in rural and remote areas; and devise solutions to raise awareness at the local level and involve governorates and local authorities and communities in identifying priorities, planning, implementing and following up to ensure that everyone benefits from development returns.

98. Recognize that ensuring that no one is left behind requires the adoption of two parallel approaches: the first should focus on tackling structural factors and dynamics that result in poverty and marginalization through inclusive public policies, and the second involves measures and targeted policies to widen the social safety net to tackle current social challenges.

99. Acknowledge that implementing the 'leaving no one behind' principle requires ending discrimination in laws and practices, disseminating a culture of tolerance and

solidarity, following human rights-based approaches, and committing to the common good.

100. Stress the importance of applying the 'leaving no on behind' principle by mainstreaming the rights and issues of young people, women, persons with disabilities, older persons and other vulnerable groups, by enabling them and involving them in planning, implementation and monitoring processes, and by preparing follow-up reports.

101. Emphasize the need to adopt new/advanced approaches in humanities and social sciences to identify disparate social groups and monitor the status of those that are not covered in national statistics.

102. Confirm the importance of measurement as a key component of development: measuring progress and identifying gaps is achieved by monitoring the situation of the most marginalized social groups, which requires avoiding national average indicators and developing indicators that measure the impact of national or local policies and programmes on the poorest and most vulnerable social groups.

103. Invite capital to invest in remote rural areas, where services, employment and education are at their lowest levels; and provide financial services, markets and training tools and manage risks for small farmers, in line with the 'leaving no one behind' principle.

Localizing the Sustainable Development Goals

104. Welcome the participation of local authority representatives at the AFSD as a step towards active interconnectedness between the local, national, regional and global levels; and raise awareness about the importance of local development in implementing the 'leaving no one behind' principle.

105. Confirm the necessity of adapting the SDGs to national contexts in the Arab region and of local authorities and municipalities adopting the 2030 Agenda and its principles as a general framework to identify priorities, goals and targets, while taking into account national strategies and programmes, on the one hand, and geographic, demographic and social characteristics, on the other; and affirm the role of cities and local communities in the regional follow-up and review process and in scrutinizing the Government and evaluating its work.

106. Recognize that achieving the SDGs requires establishing appropriate institutional implementation and follow-up mechanisms and strengthening existing partnerships with civil society and development actors by forging partnerships and networking with municipalities and by promoting further decentralization to enable local authorities to efficiently fulfil their functions, in coordination with national Governments.

107. Affirm the importance of mobilizing financial, human and administrative resources to ensure the independence of local decision-makers, which requires a review of laws that regulate budgeting and govern donors and central authorities' relationships with local authorities.

E. Supporting regional efforts to prepare for the 2019 Arab Forum

108. Stress the need to translate some messages into practical steps through regional activities implemented in the period until the 2019 Arab Forum. Those activities could include the following:

- Organize an expert group meeting comprising all partners involved in the follow-up and review process.

- Organize a meeting on follow-up mechanisms and voluntary national reviews.
- Broaden the base of consultation and dialogue between non-governmental partners, especially civil society organizations and the private sector.
- Organize an annual regional meeting for parliamentarians to strengthen national parliaments' role in implementing the 2030 Agenda and in the follow-up and review process.
- Promote knowledge production and build capacity by developing training material in Arabic on aligning the 2030 Agenda with national and regional specificities.
- Form a team of experts and trainers specialized in the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.
- Promote partnerships and organize joint activities between all actors in the field of sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda, including United Nations organizations operating in the Arab region and the League of Arab States.
- Prepare a report on progress in implementing the work programme, to be presented at the 2019 AFSD.

II. Sessions and presentations

7. In addition to an opening and closing session, the 2018 Arab Forum consisted of seven plenary sessions on the main theme "Natural resources, future generations and the common good".

8. The 2018 Arab Forum also included nine special sessions on priority issues for the Arab region.

A. Opening session

9. Speakers at the opening session included Mr. Mohamed Ali Alhakim, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCWA; Ms. Nada Al Agizy, Director of the Sustainable Development and International Cooperation Division of the League of Arab States, who spoke on behalf of the Secretary-General; Mr. Luay Shabaneh, Regional Director of the Arab States Regional Office of the United Nations Population Fund; Mr. Aziz Rabbah, Minister of Energy, Mines, and Sustainable Development of Morocco; and Mr. Ghattas Khoury, Lebanese Minister of Culture and representative of the Arab Forum's patron. Ms. Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, participated via video recording.

10. Ms. Maisaa Youssef of the ESCWA Sustainable Development Division gave an overview of the status and challenges of sustainable development in the Arab region. She summarized the political, social and environmental instability in the region, and achievements in Arab countries under the 2030 Agenda. She raised several discussion points on sustainable development initiatives launched by Arab countries, and stressed the importance of voluntary national reviews in terms of promoting and benefiting from participation between stakeholders. She presented data on SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12 and 15 from some Arab countries to highlight the lack of data for the required indicators to monitor and evaluate those SDGs.

B. Plenary sessions

Plenary session 1: Implementing the 2030 Agenda: countries' perspectives on integrated development planning and transformative change

11. Ms. Dalal Saoud, Media Expert, moderated the first plenary session, in which participated Mr. Khaled Mahdi, Secretary-General of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development of Kuwait; Mr. Ahmad Kamaly, Advisor to the Minister of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform for Planning and Monitoring of Egypt; Mr. Ahmad bin Hassan Al Hammadi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Qatar; Mr. Mohamed Al-Hawri, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation for Economic Studies Sector of Yemen; and Mr. Refaat Hijazi, Advisor to the Chairperson of the Planning and International Cooperation Commission of the Syrian Arab Republic.

12. Panellists gave an overview of their countries' work in development planning since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. The interventions highlighted the challenges facing the Arab region, especially in aligning national policies and plans with the 2030 Agenda; in monitoring, follow-up and evaluation processes requiring data and information; in development financing and economic diversification; and in making the private sector a fundamental partner in the development process.

13. Participants also underscored the challenges faced by conflict-affected countries, which limited their ability to achieve progress or growth.

Plenary session 2: Voluntary national reviews and the day after: follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda at the national level

14. Mr. Rami Ahmad, representative of the Islamic Development Bank Group, moderated the second plenary session, in which participated Ms. Haifa Al Mogrin, Assistant Deputy Minister for Sustainable Development Affairs at the Ministry of Economy and Planning of Saudi Arabia; Mr. Mahmoud Ataya, General Director of the Policy and Reform Unit at the Office of the Prime Minister of the State of Palestine; Mr. Hassan Musa Yousif, Advisor at the National Population Council of the Sudan; Mr. Ziad Obeidat, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation of Jordan; Mr. Nawfal Naciri, Member of the House of Representatives of Morocco; and Mr. Kassem El Saddik, Vice Chair of EvalSDGs in Canada.

15. Representatives presented countries' experiences in preparing voluntary national reviews. Panellists also discussed national data shortages; the importance of strengthening internal capacity and building upon cumulative experiences; the role of different actors, including parliaments, in the follow-up, monitoring and evaluation process of voluntary national reviews; and the importance of disseminating the 'leaving no one behind' principle and of reviewing policy effectiveness.

16. Mr. Kassem El Saddik gave a presentation on voluntary national reviews from a scientific perspective. Following consideration of 65 national reviews from countries across the world, it became clear that the reports often relied on incomplete indicators, failed to assess realities on the ground, and did not reflect consistency between policies and national plans. Moreover, although most national reviews discussed the institutional frameworks employed, they did not highlight the principle of gender equality or accurately present preparations for the preparatory phase preceding the drafting of national reviews.

Plenary session 3: Integrating natural resources in development planning for a resilient and sustainable future

17. Ms. Roula Majdalani, Director of the ESCWA Sustainable Development Policies Division, moderated the third plenary session, in which participated Mr. Aziz Rabbah, Ministry of Energy, Mines and Sustainable Development of Morocco; Mr. Fadi Comair, Director-General for Energy and Water at the Ministry of Energy and Water of Lebanon; Mr. Hussein Abaza, Head of the Sustainable Development Unit (Egypt 2030 Vision) at the Ministry of Planning, Follow-up and Administrative Reform of Egypt; Ms. Seteney Shami, Director-General of the Arab Council for the Social Sciences in Beirut; and Mr. Jasim Ali, Executive Manager of the Board of Directors of the Peace Generations Network in Baghdad.

18. Panellists discussed the major challenges facing Arab countries with regard to their natural resources, such as water scarcity, natural resource wastage, land depletion, and the impact of climate change, conflict and displacement. They stressed the need to move towards sustainable energy systems by improving resource management, reducing dependence on fossil fuels, employing modern irrigation systems and developing water and energy networks, and raising awareness about effective natural resource management, environmental conservation and consumption rationalization. They also highlighted the importance of countries sharing data and research outcomes, of culture and education to sustainable development, and of incorporating the principle of resource rationalization in school and university curriculums. They focused on peoples' right to sovereignty over their natural resources, and on positive competition between countries to develop their natural resources an benefit from successful experiences; and the need to include the environmental dimension in laws and strategies before their enactment, to establish regulatory bodies to follow up on them, and to empower civil society to evaluate the implementation of development policies.

Plenary session 4: Rethinking economic diversification: safeguarding the lives and livelihoods of future generations

19. Mr. Ghassan Dibeh, Chair of the Economics Department at the Lebanese American University, moderated the fourth plenary session, in which participated Mr. Hassan Janabi, Minister of Water Resources of Iraq; Mr. Muhammad Saidam, Advisor for Research and Science at the Royal Scientific Society of Jordan; Mr. Rami Shamma, Programme Manager at the Development for People and Nature Association in Lebanon; and Mr. Souhail Marine, Regional Expert on Technology for Development.

20. Interventions covered economic diversification and the need to move from consumer economies to productive economies. Panellists discussed the importance of analysing the feasibility of supporting productive sectors, and of benefiting from developed countries' experiences in that regard. They indicated other challenges impeding economic development, such as war, conflict, unregulated urbanization, and increased internal and cross-border displacement. They stressed the need to focus on innovation and the digital economy, especially in a globalized economic environment built on global value chains based on components manufactured in various countries, thus providing an opportunity for developing countries to join value chains by diversifying their economies. They also called for measures to encourage the development of the digital economy, and for new approaches to ICT strategies linked to national development plans.

Plenary session 5: Planning for resilient, inclusive and sustainable cities

21. The following panellists participated in the fifth plenary session: Ms. Huda Alsiyabi, Director of the Community-based Initiatives Department at the Ministry of Health of Oman; Mr. Adib Nehmeh, Expert in Poverty and Human Sustainable Development; Ms. Mona Fawaz, Assistant Professor of Architecture and Design at the American University of Beirut; and Mr. Suhaib Yahya Kasim Al-Darzi, Lecturer in the Civil Engineering Department at Mosul University. Mr. Omar Abdulaziz Hallaj, Senior Coordinator at the Common Space Initiative, moderated the session.

22. Discussions focused on the links between sustainable development, urban planning, promoting security, political stability, efficiency and public health, strengthening the social integration of marginalized groups, encouraging coordination between relevant government apparatuses at the local level and coordination between local and national governments, and promoting the common good at the city level.

23. Interventions covered the challenges faced by local governments and councils in rebuilding war-damaged cities and in achieving inclusive and sustainable development planning. Panellists reviewed the experience of Oman in strengthening the local administration of cities and its success in improving the health and living conditions of city inhabitants. They also discussed the need to review legislative and regulatory frameworks of local councils to ensure inhabitant participation in cities' sustainable development processes.

Plenary session 6: Financing inclusive and sustainable development in the Arab region

24. Mr. Ziad Abdel Samad, Executive Director of the Arab NGO Network for Development, moderated the sixth plenary session, in which participated Mr. Anas El Hasnaoui, regional expert on effectiveness development cooperation and civil society actor; Mr. Antoine Hobeich, representative of the Union of Arab Banks; Ms. Kinda Hattar, Regional Advisor for Middle East and North Africa at Transparency International; and Ms. Isabell Kempf, representative of the United Nations Environment Programme.

25. Discussions focused on the challenges of financing sustainable development worldwide. Participants considered the Global Partnership for Development called for by the United Nations to achieve sustainable development. They said that the partnership, which depended on official development assistance from developed countries to developing countries and on foreign direct investment, could not fulfil its mandate because of developed countries' weakened capacity to provide assistance and the increasing debt burdens of developing countries. Consequently, foreign direct investment and the private sector had become a key source of financing, thus strengthening the need for economic diversification. Participants said that given the decline of the real economy, it was necessary to enhance productive capacity in several sectors, such as manufacturing, agriculture and technology, to create employment opportunities for young people and encourage a shift from the informal sector to the formal sector. Participants also emphasized the need to combat corruption by strengthening accountability systems and frameworks, auditing, recovering stolen assets, restructuring tax and trade systems and business environments, and moving towards a green economy.

Plenary session 7: (a) Outcomes of preparatory meetings for the 2018 AFSD and the High-level Political Forum; (b) Key messages from the 2018 AFSD

26. Ms. Khawla Matar, Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCWA, moderated the seventh plenary session. Participants reviewed the outcomes of preparatory meetings

for the 2018 AFSD and High-level Political Forum. Mr. Bassel Al Ayoubi, Director-General of the Ministry of Communication of Lebanon presented the outcomes of the Arab Forum on the World Summit on the Information Society and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Mr. Azmi Shuaibi, Member of the Palestenian Legislative Council, presented the outcomes of the Regional Seminar for Parliamentarians in the Arab Region on the 2030 Agenda. Ms. Aurore Feghaly, General-Director of Oil at the Ministry of Energy and Water of Lebanon, presented the outcomes of the Arab Preparatory Meeting on Energy-related Issues for the 2018 AFSD and HLPF. Mr. Hassan Janabi, Minister of Water Resources of Iraq, presented the outcomes of the Arab Preparatory Meeting on Water Issues for the 2018 AFSD and HLPF. Mr. Zaghloul Samhan, Director-General of Policies and Planning at the Ministry of Environmental Affairs of the State of Palestine, presented the outcomes of the Arab Preparatory Meeting on Environmental and Natural Resources Issues for the 2018 AFSD and HLPF. Mr. Ziad Abdel Samad, Executive Director of the Arab NGO Network for Development, presented the outcomes of the Regional Meeting of Civil Society on Sustainable Development in the Arab Region.

27. The 2018 Arab Forum closed with a detailed statement on the key messages, followed by statements from Ms. Karima El Korri, Ms. Mona Fattah and Ms. Sabbidin of the ESCWA Unit on the 2030 Agenda. The detailed statement confirmed participants' consensus on several steps supporting national and regional processes towards achieving national sustainable development plans and the 2030 Agenda.

C. Special sessions

28. During the 2018 Arab Forum, nine special sessions where held covering development dimensions, in line with General Assembly resolution 70/299 on the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level.

1. Voluntary national reports: sharing lessons learned (DESA and ESCWA)

29. Ms. Karima El Korri, head of the ESCWA Unit on the 2030 Agenda, facilitated the session in which participated Mr. Friedrich Soltau, Senior Sustainable Development Officer at the Division for Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs; Ms. Mouchera Karara, Senior Economic Researcher at the Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform of Egypt; Ms. Ola Sidani, economic expert and SDF focal point for the Presidency of the Council of Ministers of Lebanon; Ms. Wisal Hussein, Assistant Secretary-General of the National Population Council for Technical Affairs and Sustainable Development of the Sudan; and Ms. Yeran Kejijian of the United Nations Volunteers programme.

30. Interventions covered voluntary national reviews as an accelerator of implementation and a catalyst for the localization of the 2030 Agenda; and a whole-of-government and whole-of-society mechanism to set national targets, review progress and mobilize means of implementation. Discussions focused on voluntary national reviews as an opportunity to assess whether national efforts are on the right path towards development, and an enabler of stakeholder engagement, building strategic partnerships and enhancing national ownership of the 2030 Agenda. Participants stressed the importance of the handbook for preparing voluntary national reviews (2018 edition) in terms of facilitating and guiding the work of relevant national bodies. The representatives of Egypt, Lebanon and the Sudan gave an overview of current work to prepare the voluntary national reviews of each of those countries.

2. Towards a civil society platform in the Arab region

31. The following panellists participated in the second special session: Ms. Kinda Hattar, Regional Advisor for Middle East and North Africa at Transparency International; Ms. Atidel Mejebri, Director of the Media Center at the Center of Arab Women for Training and Research; Mr. Mustafa Tlili, Executive Secretary of the Arab Trade Union Confederation; Mr. Emad Adly, General Coordinator of the Arab Network for Environment and Development; and Ms. Sylvana Lakkis, Chair of the Arab Forum for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

32. Participants discussed the outcome document of the Regional Meeting of Civil Society on Sustainable Development in the Arab Region, the topics of the 2018 Arab Forum and the region's other development priorities under the 2030 Agenda. They highlighted women's right to participate in political and public life, and the importance of mainstreaming gender equality in all aspects of development and of combating discrimination and violence against women. They added that the role of persons with disabilities should also be mainstreamed in all sustainable development issues. The discussion recognized the spread of corruption in the region, and the need to include all sectors in fighting corruption and in advocating the separation of powers. Participants focused on civil society's role in implementing the 2030 Agenda, and on the need to establish a platform for CSOs in the Arab region.

3. Water and the Sustainable Development Goals: an Arab perspective (League of Arab States and ESCWA)

33. The third special session was facilitated by Ms. Carol Chouchani Cherfane, Chief of the Water Resources Section of the ESCWA Sustainable Development Policies Division; and Mr. Ziad Khayat, First Economic Affairs Officer at the Water Resources Section. The following panellists participated in the session: Mr. Hssein Elatfy, Former Minister of Water Resources of Egypt and Secretary-General of the Arab Water Council; Mr. Omar Hattab, UNICEF regional adviser; Mr. Pascual Steduto, Director of the Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa of the Food and Agriculture Organization; Mr. Muhammad Saidam, research and scientific adviser at the Royal Scientific Society of Jordan; Ms. Luna Abu Swairah, Director-General of the Centre for Arab Unity Studies; Mr. Mr. Hammou Laamrani, Integrated Expert at the Housing, Environment and Water Department of the Secretariat of the Arab Ministerial Water Council of the League of Arab States; and Mr. Zaher Sulaimani, President of the Omani Water Association.

34. Discussions focused on the key messages and outcomes of th. Arab Preparatory Meeting on Water Issues for the 2018 AFSD and HLPF. Participants also discussed the 'human face of water scarcity', based on a working paper prepared by the Food and Agriculture Organization. Interventions covered: SDG interlinkages under conditions of water scarcity and climate change; improving shared water resource management; and water-related infrastructure and ensuring access to clean water and sanitation services for all in the regional context. Participants stressed the need to raise awareness about water-related challenges facing Arab countries, and guide efforts to promote a culture of water conservation. They also introduced the International Decade for Action on Water for Sustainable Development (2018-2028).

4. Mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment in national SDG implementation plans (UN Women and ESCWA)

35. The following panellist participated in the fourth special session: Mr. Jean Ogasapian, Minister of State for Women's Affairs of Lebanon; Ms. Shiruk Abayachi, Member of the Iraqi Parliament; Ms. Lina Abirafeh, Director of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World at the Lebanese American University; and

Ms. Begona Lasagabaster, Special Representative of the Regional Director of UN Women in Lebanon. Ms. Mehrinaz El Awady, Director of the ESCWA Centre for Women, facilitated the special session.

36. Interventions focused on gender equality and women's empowerment as key elements of the 'leaving no one behind' principle, and on the need for member States to fully and accurately reflect that dimension in their voluntary national reviews. Participants discussed experiences from Iraq and Lebanon, and best practices in the region in the field of mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment in national implementation, follow-up and reporting plans. They stressed the importance of strengthening the contribution of civil society and academic institutions in government measures on achieving gender equality targets under the SDGs. They agreed on several issues, including the need to take into account gender issues in all legislation; the importance of involving women in decision-making and in formulating policies on rationalizing natural resource management and consumption; and improving the provision and quality of sex-disaggregated data.

5. *Youth in the Arab region and the transformation towards sustainable societies (Under the auspices of the United Nations Population Fund and ESCWA)*

37. The following panellist participated in the fifth special session: Mr. Luay Shabaneh, Regional Director of the Arab States Regional Office of the United Nations Population Fund; Ms. Zeina Saab, Innovator and Entrepreneur at the Nawaya Network; Mr. Nabil Hendy, representative of the Y-Peer International Centre for Youth Development Center in Arab States. Mr. Samir Anouti, Regional Advisor on Youth at the United Nations Population Fund; and Ms. Alya Alaali, Regional Youth Expert and Co-founder of Bayanat Box. Ms. Nancy Ezzeddine, policy researcher and representative of Bayanat Box, gave a presentation on the situation of young people in the Arab region and the difficulties they faced, notably unemployment and forced migration owing to conflict. She discussed entrepreneurship and the establishment of small and medium enterprises based on innovation as mechanisms for creating employment opportunities. She also considered the status of young Arab women who faced challenges in accessing labour markets, and suffered from sexual harassment and inequalities in employment opportunities and remuneration.

38. Panellists confirmed that a major difficulty facing young people in the Arab region was the absence of a clear vision and strategy tackling youth issues and ensuring their involvement in economic, social and political development. Young people were still excluded from decision-making, although youth issues were directly related to SDG implementation.

6. *Environment and natural resources: their role in integration (Under the auspices of the League of Arab States and ESCWA)*

39. Ms. Melanie Hutchinson, Regional Development Coordinator at the United Nations Environment Programme, facilitated the sixth special session, in which participated Mr. Hammou Laamrani, Integrated Expert at the Housing, Environment and Water Department of the Secretariat of the Arab Ministerial Water Council of the League of Arab States; Ms. Soha Farouk, Associate Programme Officer at UN Habitat; Mr. Mohamed Afana, Director of Policy and International Cooperation at the Ministry of Environment of Jordan; Mr. Zaghloul Samhan, Director-General of Policies and Planning at the Ministry of Environmental Affairs of the State of Palestine; Ms. Amy Fraenkel, Cooperation and Outreach Support for the Convention on Biological Diversity Head for Mainstreaming at the Netherlands Enterprise Agency; Mr. Limam Abdawa, Sustainable Development Unit of the Poverty-Environment Initiative of Mauritania; and Mr. Hassan Abdirisak Ahmed, Project

Officer for the Somalia Climate Resilience Initiative of the United Nations Development Programme.

40. Participants confirmed that sustainable consumption and production were multisectoral empowerment tools to achieve the SDGs, and that unregulated urbanization was both the cause and result of environmental degradation and biodiversity loss. Mechanisms were therefore necessary to halt land degradation and desertification and to preserve biodiversity, as was an integrated approach to effective natural resource management. They focused on strategic environmental evaluation as a key tool for economic and development planning; and on the importance of means of implementation that included the need to strengthen innovative partnerships between sectors, and of increasing financial institutions' role in supporting countries to implement the SDGs through sustainable and green investments.

7. *"Leaving no one behind" in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Under the auspices of UNICEF and ESCWA)*

41. Panellists included Ms. Susan Nicolai, Senior Research Fellow in the Growth, Poverty and Inequality Programme of the Overseas Development Institute; Mr. Adib Nehmeh, Expert on Poverty and the 2030 Agenda; and Ms. Tamam Mroue, Executive Director of Mouvement Social.

42. The discussion focused on 'leaving no one behind' as a key principle of the 2030 Agenda, which could only be enshrined through inclusive public policies guaranteed by international law and human rights. Its application required ending discrimination in laws and practices, disseminating a culture of tolerance and solidarity, and employing rights-based approaches that ensured the common good. They stressed the importance of measurement as a key component of development work. They also emphasized the importance of adopting approaches based on humanities and social sciences to identify and monitor disparate social groups not covered by national statistics.

8. *Localizing the SDGs in the Arab region: challenges and prospects for action (Under the auspices of UN Habitat and ESCWA)*

43. Mr. Frederico Neto, Director of the ESCWA Social Development Division, facilitated the eighth special session, in which participated Ms. Soha Farouk, Programme Officer at UN Habitat; Ms. Mona Harb, Professor of Urban Studies and Politics at the American University of Beirut; Mr. Mohamed Saadieh, President of the Union of Dannieh Municipalities and Co-President of the United Cities and Local Governments World Organization; and Mr. Ahmed Mansour, Legal Researcher at the UN Habitat International Coalition — Housing and Rights Network.

44. Participants discussed the local dimension of SDG implementation, and the role of cities and local authorities in accelerating SDG implementation and in achieving the urban dimension of the 2030 Agenda. They discussed the importance of administrative and financial decentralization, capacity-building for local authorities, accountability, local measures to protect the environment and promote social and economic development, aligning between the SDGs and local plans in accordance with national priorities, and mobilizing local resources to meet increasing demand for services. Discussions covered equitable urban planning in line with the 'leaving no one behind' principle; and the importance of strengthening the participation of local stakeholders in planning and sustainable development processes. Panellists discussed SDG nationalization in the Arab region; environmental evaluation; and the assessment of governance mechanisms and institutional structures in municipalities and local authorities and their ability to implement the 2030 Agenda.

9. Sustainable energy and the transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies (Under the auspices of the League of Arab States and ESCWA)

45. Panellists included Mr. Mahmoud Mohamed Reda Mahmoud Fathallah, Senior Economist at the League of Arab States; Mr. Ahmed Abdel-Aziz Mohamed Badr, Executive Director of the Regional Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency; Mr. Ayman Fouad Ismail, General Manager of the Palestinian Electric Company; Ms. Yosra Albakkar, Regional Program Manager at the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency; Ms. Thirza Maria Bronner, Programme Director of the Energy Transition Facility of the Netherlands Enterprise Agency under the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy; and Mr. Abdessalem Khazen, Director of the Renewable Energy National Agency for Energy Management of Tunisia. Ms. Radia Sedaoui, Chief of the ESCWA Energy Section, facilitated the special session.

46. Participants commented on the key features of sustainable energy systems in Arab countries and their links to SDG7 targets. They also discussed major challenges, gaps and opportunities in addressing interlinkages between SDG7 and other SDGs. They focused on the importance of attracting and mobilizing financial resources to establish sustainable energy systems, and on key priorities in national development plans that could accelerate the transformation towards sustainable energy systems.

D. Closing session

47. The closing session was moderated by Ms. Khawla Matar, who confirmed the commitment of ESCWA to participatory approaches as a basis for the Arab Forum's success. The first draft would be sent to all participants for comments. The final draft of the 2018 Arab Forum's report would then be presented to the High-level Political Forum in July 2018.

48. Mr. Mohamed Ali Alhakim made a closing statement in which he thanked participants for their engagement in the Forum. He confirmed the commitment of ESCWA to standing by Arab countries, and to conveying the region's achievements and challenges at global forums. He also affirmed ESCWA support for Arab countries that would be submitting their voluntary national reviews that year and in following years.

III. Participants

49. The 2018 Arab Forum was attended by 300 participants from 18 Arab countries, including representatives of the organizing bodies (ESCWA, the League of Arab States, United Nations organizations operating in the Arab region including members of the Regional Coordination Mechanism), Governments, major groups and regional bodies involved in sustainable development.

50. The United Nations was represented by UNRISD, ILO, UNDP, UN Women, FAO, UNEP, UN Habitat, UNFPA, WHO, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNHCR, OHCHR and WFP.

51. Participants included over 70 officials from 18 Arab countries, 16 of which are ESCWA member States, namely, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen; in addition to Algeria and Djibouti. They included high-level representatives from various specialized ministries; national statistical offices; national population councils; and economic, social and

environmental councils. Parliamentarians from Iraq, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, the State of Palestine and Tunisia also participated.

52. Major groups and regional and international organizations and funds were represented by the Arab NGOs Network for Development, the Arab Forum for Environment and Development, the Arab Regional Network for Environment and Development, the Arab Network for Food Sovereignty, the Arab Group for the Protection of Nature, Arab Organization of Persons with Disabilities, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Centre of Arab Women for Training and Research, the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization, the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas, the Middle East Desalination Research Centre, the Council of Arab Economic Unity, the Regional Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency, the Arab Countries Water Utilities Association, Transparency International, the Saudi Fund for Development, the Islamic Development Bank, and the World Association of Persons with Disabilities. Participants also included representatives of Arab and international academic institutions and of Lebanese, Arab and international media outlets.

Annex

Outcome document of preparatory meetings for the 2018 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development and high-level political forum on sustainable development

Arab High-level Forum on the World Summit on the Information Society and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Available at https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/beirut-consensus-ahlf2017-en.pdf.

Regional Seminar for Parliamentarians on the 2030 Agenda. Available at https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/seminar-parliaments-agenda-2030-final-report-en.pdf.

Arab Preparatory Meeting on Energy-related Issued for the 2018 AFSD and the HLPF. Available at https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/outcome_document_on_energy_issues_for_2018_afsd-hlpf_english.pdf.

Arab Preparatory Meeting on Water Issues for the 2018 AFSD and the HLPF. Available at https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/outcome_document-afsd-_prep_meeting2017-en.pdf.

Arab Preparatory Meeting on Environmental and Natural Resources Issues for the 2018 AFSD and the HLPF. Available at https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/outcome_document-final_en.pdf.

Regional Meeting of Civil Society on Sustainable Development in the Arab Region. Available at https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/meeting-arab-civil-society-sustainable-development-key-messages-ar_2.pdf (in Arabic).